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Version: Version of Record

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:

<http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21954/ou.ro.0000d683>

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Choral Authoritativeness in Sophocles

Submitted for the award of PhD

The Open University: School of Art History, Classical
Studies, English & Creative Writing, Music

November 2017

Abstract

The ‘authority’ of the chorus in Greek tragedy has been a matter of discussion for a very long time. The word *authority*, however, has two distinct meanings: it can refer to the status of the chorus within the dramatic world and to the truthfulness or reliability of the choral discourse. To avoid this confusion, I use the term *authoritativeness* in this thesis to indicate the extent to which we can trust what the chorus are saying, chanting, or singing.

In chapter 1, I establish a number of textual and linguistic markers which suggest whether a choral discourse can potentially be regarded as authoritative. One important factor is identifying where the chorus operate as a stage figure and where *qua* chorus. The subsequent chapters are taken up by case studies in which I closely analyse the language and context of the chorus’s utterances in three of Sophocles’ seven extant tragedies. I have chosen the *Philoctetes*, the *Antigone*, and the *Electra* because, in each, the chorus is used in a different way.

Altogether, my analysis shows how Sophocles constantly experiments with the use of the choral voice: some markers raise the expectations that choral comments and judgements can be taken as a reliable guide for an interpretation of the action. At the same time, however, different devices undermine this potential authoritativeness, making the precise meaning of the discourse ambiguous or multivalent and contributing to the continuing disagreements on the precise interpretation of the tragedies.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my three supervisors, Dr James Robson, Dr Elton Barker, and Dr Laura Swift. Each contributed in their own and very personal way to the completion of this thesis. James first suggested I look at Michael Silk's work on choral authority and at some of the scholarly writing on Greek comedy. This provided a springboard for my thinking on choral authoritativeness. He also led the supervision sessions with great humour, making them a safe environment for criticism. Elton added Simon Goldhill to my reading list. Moreover, he tirelessly pointed out inconsistencies in my submissions and helped me improve the framing, sign-posting, and concision of my writing. Last but not least, Laura suggested new areas of research based on her vast knowledge of the Greek chorus and of epic, lyric, and tragic poetry in general. Her personal kindness also nursed me through periods of self-doubt and stress. All three patiently read my often rambling essays and made incisive and constructive comments which showed both their expertise and enthusiasm for the subject. I could not have completed this thesis without them.

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INTRODUCTION

In Sophocles' plays, stage figures from different backgrounds face extreme situations which oblige them to make momentous decisions: at one end of the spectrum, in the *Antigone*, a king and mature man has to judge whether he is justified in imposing the death penalty on his niece in order to maintain this royal authority; at the other end, in the *Electra*, a young woman without any political power must decide whether behaving disrespectfully towards her mother and plotting her death in order to avenge her father's murder is truly a sign of piety.

As we can see from just two examples of Sophocles' extant oeuvre, the poet's tragedies deal with morally and ethically challenging questions. In the course of the action, resolute individuals are often pitched against each other, against their families, and the wider society. The presentation of the conflict, however, is not weighted towards a particular reading: while each protagonist refuses to yield to the demands of those around them, the play's discourse subtly examines the merits and demerits of the different options. This makes Sophocles' drama intellectually stimulating and encourages each spectator constantly to re-assess their response, not only during the performance but also beyond the ending of the play.

The chorus play an important role in this examination of the issues: in the episodes, the chorus leader interacts directly with the protagonists, commenting on their speeches, sometimes even attempting to influence their conduct. In the odes, on the other hand, the full group step back from their stage *persona* and reflect on the action in song and dance, evaluating it in a more lyrical and poetic manner. This initially makes it sound as though their discourse is meant to provide an authoritative guide to the interpretation of the events unfolding on stage

It soon becomes clear, however, that judgements made by the *choreutai* are not always trustworthy. Sometimes spectators know more

than the chorus do, either from the myth on which the action is based or from information gleaned in earlier scenes during which the chorus were not present. At other times, there is something odd about the wording itself: some utterances are inconsistent with the chorus's earlier words, there may be a sense that there is more to their statements than the surface meaning suggests, and some choral passages are so oblique that the precise meaning becomes ambiguous, making the discourse multivalent. The language, then, is of great importance if we want to decide whether we can trust what the chorus are telling us or, to put it differently, whether their utterances are *authoritative*.

A number of scholars have discussed what they call the 'authority' of the group and have commented on how it affects the choral voice in Greek tragedy in general terms but they have not always defined what they mean by authority or have assumed that there is a correlation between status and authority.¹ The socio-political background of the group, however, does not guarantee that their comments and judgements can be taken as a reliable guide to the interpretation of a particular scene or of the tragedy as a whole. In this thesis, I shall, therefore, use the term *authoritativeness* rather than authority to assess the credibility of a discourse. Moreover, instead of proposing a general theory about 'the chorus', I shall closely analyse the precise wording and context of utterances in each of my chosen plays to identify comments that can potentially be regarded as trustworthy.

In chapter 1, I shall give a brief survey of other scholars' work on the Greek chorus. I shall then define in more detail what I mean by *authoritativeness* and establish a number of textual and linguistic markers which suggest that a chorus's discourse can potentially be regarded as trustworthy. One important factor will be identifying where the chorus

¹ See, for instance, Gould, 1996 and Goldhill, 1996.

operate as a stage figure and where *qua* chorus. This will involve adapting Plato's analysis of the *modes* of communication (*mimesis* and *diegesis*) and Genette's model of the different *levels* on which a discourse can take place (*intra-diegetic*, *meta-diegetic*, *extra-diegetic*). I shall show how they affect the extent to which a discourse sounds authoritative. This apparent trustworthiness, however, is regularly undermined by what Bakhtin calls *dialogic overtones* and *double-voiced discourse*.

The subsequent chapters will be taken up by case studies: I shall closely analyse the chorus's language in three of Sophocles' seven extant tragedies, showing how the markers of authoritativeness I have identified in chapter 1 can help decide whether we can trust choral comments and judgements. I shall start each chapter with a brief literature review to show the controversies the tragedy has provoked, then examine the play scene by scene.

Let me briefly digress to explain what I mean by 'a spectator in the theatre'. First, when I talk about *theatre*, I am initially thinking of the ancient Theatre of Dionysus in Athens where the plays were first performed. All of Sophocles' extant tragedies are based on traditional myths and, in the fifth century BCE, many theatregoers will have been familiar with the most popular of these stories from earlier tellings in epic, lyric, or dramatic poetry.² They may, therefore, have had certain expectations of the general direction of the plot, and this would have affected the way they viewed the action presented on stage.³

² See van Erp, 1990, for arguments for and against the view that the majority of the spectators were familiar with the myths on which tragedies were based. In the fourth century BCE, Aristotle famously wrote, in *Poetics* chapter 9, that 'even the familiar plots are familiar only to a minority' (τὰ γινώριμα ὀλίγοις γινώριμά ἐστιν, *Poetics*, 1451b25-6). On the other hand, a character in the play *Poiesis* by the fourth-century comedian Antiphanes comments 'I need only say Oedipus and immediately they know everything else' (fr. 191 Kock, quoted in van Erp, p. 21). Certain myths, at the very least then, were well known.

³ See Burian, 1997, pp. 178-208, on story patterns and genre conventions in Greek tragedy.

Secondly, ancient spectators had many opportunities to go to tragic performances: as part of the annual Athenian festival of the Great Dionysia alone, they could attend three tetralogies, viewing nine tragedies over a period of just three days.⁴ The traditional structure of tragedies, then, with their regular alternation of episodes of spoken stage action with choral group reflection in lyric, will have been familiar to many. Some members of the audience may, therefore, have noted conspicuous deviations from the pattern and reflected on the effect they produced.

On the other hand, ancient spectators also varied widely, not only in terms of their potential knowledge of myth and their theatrical experience, but also, for instance, in their geographical and socio-political background, their education and rhetorical competence, and their general mindset.⁵ Sophocles' plays, however, are conceived in such a way as to allow spectators without any particular background knowledge to make sense of the events and the moral issues presented on stage. My discussion is, therefore, also relevant to twenty-first century theatregoers without any specialism in Greek tragedy. Such viewers may, however, miss some aspects of the handling of the story, and I, therefore, include provisos where mythological or theatrical expertise potentially affects their interpretation.

Secondly, I shall generally talk about 'the *spectator*' rather than 'the audience': modern response theory has shown that theatregoers do not react *en masse* to the events presented on stage.⁶ Every viewer is different, and this affects the way they engage with the action unfolding in front of

⁴ See Pickard-Cambridge, 1988, pp. 79-82, on the presentation of tragedies at the Great Dionysia and Wiles, 2000, pp. 30-31, on the festival's timetable.

⁵ For the composition of the audience, see, for instance, Henderson, 1991; Goldhill, 1997; Sommerstein, 1997; Carter, 2011; Roselli, 2011. For audience competence, see especially Revermann, 2006. For the view that an audience member's mindset might influence their interpretation of the action, see Pelling, 2000, pp. 199-200, on Euripides' *Medea*.

⁶ For audience response, see Iser, 1974; Fish, 1980; Tompkins, 1980; Budelmann, Maguire and Teasdale, 2016.

them. In addition, Sophocles often leaves the precise motivation of his stage figures, including the chorus, open and introduces further ambiguity by linguistic means. He, therefore, seems positively to encourage a multivalent interpretation of his plays.

Finally, ‘spectator’, to a certain extent, is shorthand for ‘spectator and reader’. Close linguistic scrutiny of long, and linguistically and metrically complex, choral odes is impossible during a live event. Moreover, theatregoers cannot re-evaluate their initial response in any depth during the performance since the continuing action requires their constant focus and attention. In addition, they almost inevitably get emotionally drawn into the events presented on stage,⁷ and this makes an entirely rational and objective response difficult. Some of my findings, therefore, require studying a written text where it is possible to go back and forth between scenes and examine the language closely and dispassionately.

The plays I have chosen as my case studies are the *Philoctetes*, the *Antigone*, and the *Electra*: in each, the chorus are used in a different way. A detailed analysis of Sophocles’ other extant tragedies is beyond the scope of this thesis, but I have included examples from his other plays in chapter 1 and refer to others in my footnotes across the thesis. In all of them, an examination of the modes and levels of communication helps establish where the *choreutai* operate as a stage figure, whose comments and judgements are not necessarily trustworthy, and where *qua* chorus, whose evaluations can be used as an authoritative guide to the interpretation of the action. Identifying where their function is ambiguous, moreover, will

⁷ Cf. Aristotle, *Poetics* chapter 6, for the view that tragedy arouses ‘fear’ and ‘pity’ in the spectator (ἐλέου καὶ φόβου, 1449b27-8). In Book X of his *Republic*, Plato eliminates dramatic poets from his ideal city because they destroy the ‘rational part’ (τὸ λογιστικόν, 605b) of the audience’s soul and instead gratify that which is ‘senseless’ (τῷ ἀνοήτῳ, 605b). Similarly *Ion* 535e and *Laws* 800d.

explain why critics come to such different, often diametrically opposed, interpretations of the action.

In the *Philoctetes* (chapter 2) the chorus participate fully in the action, and this immediately makes the trustworthiness of their utterances uncertain. There are, however, a number of passages where both mode and level of communication change, and I shall show that there is a correlation between these shifts and the authoritativeness of the discourse. At the same time, however, the use of double-voiced discourse raises questions about the reliability of the chorus's evaluations.

In my next two tragedies, the markers of authoritativeness are more prominent than in the *Philoctetes*. Sophocles, however, experiments with the choral discourse in other ways. In chapter 3, I shall analyse the *Antigone* and show that the chorus do not react monovocally to the action. Instead, their odes and *kommoi* make more sense if we see the group as divided, one voice illuminating the action from Antigone's point of view, the other from Creon's. This makes it ambiguous exactly how a spectator is supposed to respond to the moral and ethical questions raised by the play.

Finally, in chapter 4, I shall examine the *Electra*. As in the *Philoctetes*, the chorus participate conspicuously in the action but, in contrast to Neoptolemus' sailors, the Argive women are more critical of the protagonist's conduct. The potential authoritativeness of their discourse is again signalled by changes in the mode and level of communication. Electra's utterances, however, also display some of the markers of authoritativeness, and this raises the possibility that her judgement is more trustworthy than that of the chorus. This leaves it open how the matricide at the end of the tragedy is to be evaluated.

Altogether, my analysis will show how Sophocles constantly experiments with the use of the choral voice: some markers create the expectations that choral comments and judgements can be taken as a

reliable guide for an interpretation of the action. At the same time, however, different devices undermine this potential authoritativeness, making the precise meaning of the discourse ambiguous or multivalent and contributing to the continuing disagreements on the precise reading of the tragedies.

Before I go on to chapter 1, a brief note on the translations: in general, where I quote long sections of text, I start with published, stylistically polished, translations. For Sophocles, these usually come from the Loeb edition by H. Lloyd-Jones. I often adapt these, however, to enable me to bring out particular points I want to make. The translations of short passages are entirely my own.

CHAPTER 1: THE AUTHORITATIVENESS OF THE CHORUS

INTRODUCTION

The chorus of Greek tragedy are different from the stage figures: in the odes, their discourse is often more reflective, they perform in a different medium, including music and dance,¹ their language is more poetic, and they respond as a group to the action of individuals. This sets them apart from the protagonists. Their comments and evaluations have, therefore, often been seen as being more trustworthy than those of the figures performing on stage. In this chapter, I shall evaluate to what extent this is true and try to establish some markers which suggest that a chorus's discourse may potentially be read as authoritative. To begin with, however, I would like briefly to survey what conclusions critics have come to so far in their research on the authority of the Greek chorus.

Scholars' perceptions fall somewhere between two extremes. At the one end of the scale is Schlegel (1846) who sees the chorus 'as a personified reflection on the action which is going on; the incorporation into the representation of the sentiment of the poet; [...] the idealized spectator' (pp. 69-70).² If choral utterances represent the poet's voice, they are, presumably, trustworthy. Even a cursory glance at Sophocles' extant tragedies, however, reveals that this view is oversimplified: in four of the poet's seven surviving plays we find what some critics call a *hyporchēme*,³ a joyous ode before disaster, where the *choreutai* interpret the action in a way which does not accord with the myth with which many spectators are likely to have been familiar. The subsequent action, too, proves the

¹ On ancient Greek music, see e.g. Barker, 1984; West, 1992; Landells, 1999; Murray and Wilson, 2004; Hagel, 2009.

² Kranz (1933) agrees with Schlegel: 'der Chor ist [...] Organ des dichterischen Ich' (p. 171). He also believes, however, 'daß eine solche einfache Formel niemals das Wesen eines so reichen und vielseitigen, so wandlungsfähigen Geschöpfes fassen und ausreichend bezeichnen kann' (p. 225).

³ On the term *hyporchēme*, see Dale, 1950, pp. 14-20. She insists that applying the term to certain tragic odes is 'without meaning' (p. 40).

group's evaluation to be wrong.⁴ Choruses who so obviously misjudge a situation cannot be providing a consistently reliable evaluation of the action.

At the other extreme are scholars who deny the group any authoritativeness whatsoever. Some take their lead from Aristotle who writes that the chorus in tragedy should 'be treated as one of the actors' (ἐνα [...] τῶν ὑποκριτῶν, *Poetics* 19.1456a25). Critics like Kitto (1933), Kirkwood (1958), Müller (1967), Gardiner (1987), and Paillard (2017), therefore, see them as simply another stage figure, 'neither omniscient nor stupid, but limited like other characters by the natural limitations of their position and their interest in the action'.⁵ This position, however, is also insufficient to explain the chorus's function. Kirkwood already admits that they are 'strange characters, [...] with a penchant for lyrics and abstractions' (p. 186). There are other features, too, that are difficult to justify if we regard the *choreutai* as a mere stage figure: some of their utterances are inconsistent with their earlier discourse,⁶ some odes contain

⁴ In the *Trachiniae* (205-224, 634-62) the *choreutai* foresee a happy future for Deianeira and Heracles; Nessus' philtre, however, will kill the hero. In the *Ajax* (693-718), the sailors express their joy at the eponymous hero's apparent decision not to commit suicide, yet in the next scene we see him fall on his sword. In the *Antigone* (1115-52), the *choreutai* are hopeful that, Dionysus will come to Thebes 'with cleansing movement' (1144) since Creon has decided to release Antigone and bury Polynices; not long afterwards, however, we learn of the deaths of Antigone, Haemon and Eurydice. Finally, in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* (1086-1109), the *choreutai* ecstatically predict that one of the nymphs on Mount Cithaeron gave birth to the king, but in the next scene we find out that his mother is in fact Jocasta, whom Oedipus unwittingly married.

⁵ Kirkwood, 1958, p. 186.

⁶ In *Poetics*, chapter 15, Aristotle writes that a stage figure needs to show 'consistency' (τὸ ὁμοιον, 1454a25) or that, if they are 'inconsistent' (ἀνώμαλος, 1454a25), they should, at least, be 'consistently inconsistent' (ὁμαλῶς ἀνώμαλον, 1454a27). Burton, 1980, explains such inconsistencies by saying that 'since the chorus has a group personality, we do not expect for it the same consistency or coherence of character as we expect from an individual' (p. 3). See Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, 1917, for a similar view but for the stage figures: he writes 'daß die Psychologie der Personen dem Dichter [...] gleichgültig ist' (p. 209, on the *Electra*) and that, instead, it is the dramatic effect of their utterances that matters. Cf. Lloyd-Jones, 1972.

an 'ironic and powerful shadowing'⁷ and, often, 'their words have a deeper and higher wisdom altogether'.⁸

Some scholars argue that the construction of the group's authority should not be seen in isolation, but that the Athenian democratic context played an important role. Vernant (1988), for instance, sees them as 'the mouthpiece of the city' (p. 311), 'an anonymous and collective being whose role it is to express, through its fears, hopes and judgements, the feelings of the spectators who make up the civic community' (p. 24).⁹ In a democracy, the view of this group carries some weight.¹⁰ Gould (1996), on the other hand, argues that the social marginality of many choruses prevents them from being 'in any sense a privileged presence within the tragic fiction' (p. 231): he believes that, since the group are often comprised of women, slaves, captives of war, or old men and are, therefore, unable to initiate or control the action of the play, they cannot represent the voice of the 'institutional core of adult, male citizen-hoplites of democratic Athens' (p. 220-21). Nonetheless, even Gould admits that the *choreutai* regularly bring to bear 'a stable and stabilizing, gnomic wisdom' (p. 227) on the evaluation of the action.¹¹

Other critics, too, see a connection between the fictive world of the drama and the real world of the audience in the theatre of Dionysus, but they focus on the ritual context. Henrichs (1994/5), for instance, argues that, since choral odes in drama combine music and dance, this establishes a connection between them and other, cultic or non-cultic,

⁷ Kitto, 1933, p. 164, on the *Antigone*.

⁸ Silk, 1981, p. 268.

⁹ See Calame, 1999, for a detailed discussion of the civic identity of the chorus.

¹⁰ Critics who argue for a connection between Greek tragedy and Athenian democracy: e.g. Connor, 1989; Goldhill, 1990; Calame, 1999; Carter, 2007 and 2011; Wilson, 2000 and 2011; Burian, 2011. Contra Rhodes, 2003, who sees Athenian drama reflecting the *polis* in general rather than the democratic *polis* in particular.

¹¹ For the importance of *gnōmai* and mythological *comparanda* in the choral discourse, see also Gould, 2001, ch. 18, pp. 405-14.

choral lyric outside the theatre.¹² Goldhill (1996) sees a similar relationship between the two worlds and concludes that the group's inherited wisdom, their frequent use of *gnōmai* and their recourse to the traditions of myth would have carried some weight with the ancient spectator since 'the ritual aspect of choral performance [...] may be thought to draw it towards the position of the authoritative utterances of the *sophos* in the scene of education' (p. 251).¹³ Mastronarde (2010) draws together the debate, saying that 'choral poems contained a variable mixture of three main kinds of authoritative discourse: performative utterances,¹⁴ gnomic statements, and mythic content' (p. 91).¹⁵ In my view, these statements need qualifying because they fail to take account of the immediate context and the precise wording of the choral discourse at the time of utterance.

Finally, some scholars see the *medium* in which the chorus communicate as a possible indicator of their authority. Actors, in the

¹² The *choreutai* refer to their own performance in the *hyporchēmata* of the *Trachiniae*, the *Ajax*, the *Antigone* and the *Oedipus Tyrannus* already mentioned above, as well as in the second *stasimon* of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* (863-910). Choral odes or *amoibaia/kommoi* that contain clear cultic elements: *Trachiniae: parodos* (prayer for the safe return of Heracles, 94-140), fourth *stasimon* (lament for Deianeira and Heracles, 947-70); *Ajax*: third *stasimon* (lament for Ajax, 1185-222); *Antigone: parodos* (thanksgiving for the end of the civil war, 100-54), first *kommos* (Antigone's lament, 806-82); *Oedipus Tyrannus: parodos* (appeal to the gods, 151-215); *Electra: parodos* (lament, 121-250), first *stasimon* (Justice and the Erinyes, 473-501), third *stasimon* (Ares, 1384-97); *Philoctetes*: prayer to Cybele (391-402), *paean* to Sleep (827-38); *Oedipus Coloneus*: preparations for Oedipus' death (1448-99), fourth *stasimon* (prayer to the divinities of underworld, 1556-78), *kommos* (lament for Oedipus, 1670-1750). Cf. Swift, 2010, for an examination of the generic interaction between lyric outside the theatre and tragic choral odes. See Rodighiero, 2012, for a similar approach but specifically for Sophocles. See Herington, 1985, for echoes of choral melic poetry in tragedy.

¹³ For the view that choral training was a vital part of education, see Plato who at *Laws* 2.654a has the Athenian ask 'Shall we assume that the uneducated man (ἀπαίδευτος) is without choir-training (ἀχόρευτος), and the educated man (πεπαιδευμένον) fully choir-trained (κεχορευκότα)?' Choral performance, then, was deemed to have a didactic function. See Croally, 2005, pp. 55-70; Roselli, 2011, pp. 25-6.

¹⁴ Mastronarde, 2010, defines performative utterances as 'self-exhortations that refer to the music and dance or other movements', as well as 'the cultic elements of summons, thanksgiving, prayers for prosperity and protection, and the like' (p. 91). See also Mastronarde, 1998 and 1999.

¹⁵ Mythological *comparanda* in Sophocles: Niobe and/or Procne (*Ant.* 824-31 and *El.* 147-52, 1077), Amphiaraus (*El.* 837-48), Danae, Lycurgus, and Cleopatra (*Ant.* 944-87), and Ixion (*Phil.* 676-9).

episodes, speak in Attic Greek in iambic trimeters, a metre which, as Aristotle says in *Poetics*, ‘more than any other, has the rhythm of speech’ (πλεῖστα γὰρ [...] ἐν τῇ διαλέκτῳ τῇ πρὸς ἀλλήλους, 4.1449a25-6). Choral odes, on the other hand, are sung in a pseudo-Doric dialect and employ highly complex rhythms in compound metres. In addition, the language is in, what Silk (1999) calls, a ‘high style’, ‘an idiom that is stylized by its elevation beyond the everyday’ (p. 2). Some utterances, he argues, go even further, using an ‘intensified style’, ‘an idiom that defamiliarizes or enacts’ (p. 2). Where this is not ‘relatable to any personalized emotion, nor to any personal specificities associated with those uttering the words’ (p. 15), it ‘raises an expectation (no more) that its free discourse carries authority’ (p. 17). He concludes that ‘choral authority is latent; intensification brings it to the point of realization’ (p. 17).

I, too, believe that some choral utterances are authoritative and that their style plays an important role in making us think of them as such but I want to be more specific in my terminology. As we have seen, most critics use the noun *authority*. This word, however, has two, in my view, quite distinct meanings: first, it can refer to the social and political status of the chorus within the dramatic world; secondly, it can be used to describe the truthfulness or reliability of the choral discourse. Few critics distinguish between the two usages and most, like Gould, assume that there is a connection between them.¹⁶ In my view, however, this need not be the

¹⁶ It is true, Goldhill, 1996, rejects Gould’s view that there is necessarily a correlation between ‘social marginality’ and ‘lack of authority of voice’ (p. 253), but he does not define what he means by ‘authority’. Two recent critics define ‘authority’ in a different way: Nooter, 2011, examining the discourse of the singing Sophoclean hero, bases her definition of ‘authority’ on the writings of Arendt, 1954, and von Hallberg, 2008: she uses the term in connection with the ability of a fictive poet (i.e. the singing Sophoclean hero) to ‘wield approval but not power’ (p. 25). Dhuga, 2005, talks about ‘choral metrical authority’ which he defines as ‘choral metrical shifts that can cause the chorus’ interlocutors to shift meters in a manner that reflects the rhetorical and/or politico-ritual

case. The women who form the chorus of the *Trachiniae*, for instance, would, by their gender and age, be at the lower end of Gould's authority; yet when, in the third *stasimon*, they sing 'how might one who no longer sees, still, still maintain in death his laborious servitude of labours?' (πῶς [...] ἄν ὁ μὴ λεύσσω / ἔτι ποτ' ἔτ' ἐπίπονον πόνων ἔχοι θανῶν λατρείαν; 829-30), this utterance is authoritative since it finally provides the solution to the riddle of the prophecy concerning Heracles' final labour and so explains the overarching shape of the tragedy. To avoid such ambiguity I prefer, therefore, to use the term *authoritativeness* when talking about utterances which sound as though they can be used as a trustworthy and reliable guide to the interpretation of a particular scene or of the play as a whole.

As we saw, Silk provides one possible indicator of choral authoritativeness, to use my term, one that involves the *style* of the group's discourse. Linguistic elevation will also be one of my markers. Unlike Silk, however, who does not define in detail what he means by 'high' or 'intensified' style, I shall be more specific, using some of the categories suggested by Most (1993). Unlike Aristotle, Most does not believe that there is a specific poetic language.¹⁷ Instead, he writes that 'there seems to be a broad range of available linguistic markers which can be used to characterize a text as poetic, and both their *prominence* and *frequency* on the one hand and their *reciprocal* and *cumulative effect* on the other play a decisive role in making a text recognizably poetic' (p. 551, my italics). He goes on to identify lexical, phonetic, semantic, and syntactic features as making a text 'poetic'. In Sophocles, such markers often draw attention to utterances that can be used to guide an interpretation of a particular scene or of the play as a whole. The words of the women of Trachis which I

maneuvering [sic] within a given scene' (p. 16). Both conceptions, however, are quite different from what I see as the potential trustworthiness of the chorus's discourse.

¹⁷ For Aristotle on poetic language, see *Poetics* 1.1447a2, 21.1457b1-3; 22.1458a17-b5, 22.149a11-14; *Rhetoric* 3.6.1407b31ff.

quoted in the previous paragraph are a succinct example: in the one sentence, there is a poetic verb (λεύσσω, literally 'I gaze'), repetition of ἔτι ('still'), and the polyptoton ἐπίπονον / πόνων ('laborious / labours'). It is poetic markers such as these that help to make an utterance sound trustworthy.

There are, however, a number of other markers of authoritativeness, and I shall suggest them in the rest of this chapter. I shall start by looking at the two basic *modes* of storytelling which Plato identifies in his analysis of the Homeric narrative. I shall then discuss the different *levels* of communication and the voices we hear, adapting a model proposed by Genette (1980). Finally, I shall examine the concepts of *dialogic overtones* and *double-voiced discourse* suggested by Bakhtin (1984).

1. MODES OF COMMUNICATION: PLATO'S *MIMESIS* AND *DIEGESIS*

In the third book of *The Republic*, Plato's Socrates explains that a story can be conveyed in two basic modes: *diegesis* ('pure narration', ἀπλῇ διηγήσει, 392d5) or *mimesis* ('through imitation', διὰ μιμήσεως, 394c1). Many stories, of course, use a combination of these two basic modes and, unlike Aristotle, Plato includes Homer's epics in this category.¹⁸ He explains this with an example from the start of Book 1 of the *Iliad* where Chryses implores Agamemnon and Menelaus to release his daughter (15-16):

Up to the verses, 'And begged all the Achaeans, chiefly Atreus' sons, twin leaders who marshalled the people,' the poet himself is the speaker and does not even attempt to suggest to us that anyone but himself is speaking. But he

¹⁸ For Aristotle 'epic and tragic poetry, as well as comedy, [...] are all, taken as a whole, kinds of *mimesis*' (μιμήσεις, *Poetics* 1.1447a13-16). Despite this initial distinction, however, he actually agrees with Plato's analysis 'for in the same media one can represent the same object by combining narrative (τὰ [...] ἀπαγγέλλοντα) with direct personation (ἑτερόν τι γιγνόμενον), as Homer does; or in an invariable narrative voice (τὸν αὐτὸν καὶ μὴ μεταβάλλοντα); or by direct enactment of all roles' (πράττοντας καὶ ἐνεργοῦντας τοὺς μιμουμένους, 1448a19-23, trans. Halliwell, 1995).

delivers what follows as if he were himself Chryses and tries as far possible to make us feel that not Homer is the speaker, but the priest, an old man. [...] Now, it is narration (διήγησις), is it not, both when he introduces the several speeches (τὰς ῥήσεις ἐκάστοτε) and the matter between the speeches (τὰ μεταξὺ τῶν ῥήσεων). [...] But when he delivers a speech as if he were someone else, shall we not say that he then assimilates his own diction as far as possible to that of the person concerned? [...] And is not likening oneself to another's speech or bodily bearing an imitation (μιμεῖσθαι) of him to whom one likens one's self? [...] In such case then it appears that he and the other poets effect their narration (τὴν διήγησιν) through imitation (διὰ μιμήσεως). [...] But if the poet should not conceal himself anywhere, then his entire poetizing and narration (πᾶσα [...] ἡ ποιήσις τε καὶ διήγησις) would have been accomplished without imitation (ἄνευ μιμήσεως).

The Republic 3.393b7-393d2¹⁹

In epic, then, according to Plato's Socrates, the passages recounted by the narrator are made in the *diegetic* mode of communication while the speeches, where the storyteller effaces himself and takes on the *persona* of the speaker, are in *mimesis*.

Tragedy and comedy, according to Plato's Socrates, are different for when one removes 'the words of the poet between the speeches' (τὰ τοῦ ποιητοῦ τὰ μεταξὺ τῶν ῥήσεων) and only leaves 'the alternation of speeches' (τὰ ἀμοιβαῖα), this kind of poetry and tale-telling works 'wholly through imitation' (διὰ μιμήσεως ὅλη) (*Republic*, 394b9-394c1). According to Plato, then, tragedy and comedy are pure *mimesis*.²⁰

This, however, is an oversimplification of the use of modes in the theatre of classical Greece. Barrett (2002) argues that Greek tragedy, too, contains some passages of *diegesis*, namely in the accounts of messengers who have 'a narrative voice that closely resembles that of epic' (p. xvi).

¹⁹ Trans. Shorey, 1930, adapted.

²⁰ There is a detailed analysis of this passage in Genette, 1980, pp. 162-75.

Although these reports are indeed speeches, the communication here is mediated since we are no longer *shown* events directly but are *told* about them.²¹

Greek tragedy, in my view, combines *mimesis* and *diegesis* in another way: in the performance of the chorus. In the episodes, the chorus-leader acts as one of the stage figures:²² he or she takes part in the dialogue, directly participates in the on-stage representation of events,²³ and thus operates in the *mimetic* mode. Choral odes, however, are often different. Even though the *choreutai* are still 'in character' (they wear the same costumes and masks and have the same identity as the *coryphaeus*), they now sometimes perform in the *diegetic* mode: using a different medium, that is, *mousikē* (language combined with song, dancing, and possibly instrumental accompaniment), they *tell* us about events, comment on them, and make judgements. In my view, the fact that they function as a narrator has an impact on the way we can view their utterances and I shall explain this with my first example from Sophocles.

Example 1: The first *stasimon* of Sophocles' *Trachiniae*²⁴

The first *stasimon* (508-30) occurs after Heracles' herald Lichas has arrived with the news that his master has completed his last labour and is about to return to his wife and family in Trachis. In anticipation, Lichas has already brought some women captives with him, one of whom attracts Deianeira's

²¹ See also Goward, 1999, on tragedy as a 'hybrid form' (p. 11).

²² In *Poetics*, chapter 12, Aristotle defines an 'episode' as the 'whole portion of a tragedy between complete choral songs' (μέρος ὅλον τραγωδίας τὸ μεταξύ ὅλων χορικῶν μελῶν, 1452b21-2).

²³ By 'on-stage' I do not necessarily mean that the chorus-leader performs on a stage, i.e. in an area separate from, possibly raised above, the *orchēstra*. I simply mean that they are part of the stage action. For the possible use of the *orchēstra* by stage figures, see Ley and Ewans, 1985. For the presence of a discreet stage area, see Scully, 1996. Contra Wiles, 1997, pp. 63-7, and 2000, pp. 104-9.

²⁴ The *Trachiniae* is not a play I shall examine in the chapters to come. As we shall see, however, in all my chosen plays there are stanzas in which the discourse conspicuously shifts from *mimesis* to *diegesis*. The first *stasimon* of the *Trachiniae* is, however, an example of an ode almost entirely in the diegetic mode of communication.

particular attention and pity. Lichas eventually has to admit that this young woman is his master's concubine Iole, daughter of king Eurytus, for whose sake Heracles sacked the city of Oechalia. In the first *stasimon* the *choreutai* sing how Deianeira, too, was won by Heracles in a violent struggle, and their song is a good example of how, in choral odes, the mode of communication can shift from *mimesis* to *diegesis*.

Strophe

μέγα τι σθένος ἅ Κύπρις ἐκφέρεται νίκας αἰεί
καὶ τὰ μὲν θεῶν
παρέβαν, καὶ ὅπως Κρονίδαν ἀπάτασεν οὐ λέγω, 500
οὐδὲ τὸν ἔννυχον Ἴδαν
ἢ Ποσειδάωνα τινάκτορα γαίας·
ἀλλ' ἐπὶ τάνδ' ἄρ' ἄκοιτιν
τίνες ἀμφίγυοι κατέβαν πρὸ γάμων,
τίνες πάμπληκτα παγκόνιτά τ' ἐξ- 505
ἦλθον ἄεθλ' ἀγώνων;

Antistrophe

ὁ μὲν ἦν ποταμοῦ σθένος, ὑψίκερως τετραόρου
φάσμα τάρου,
Ἀχελῷος ἀπ' Οἰνιαδᾶν, ὁ δὲ Βακχίας ἀπὸ 510
ἦλθε παλίντονα Θήβας
τόξα καὶ λόγχας ῥόπαλόν τε τινάσσων,
παῖς Διός· οἱ τότε ἄλλεῖς
ἴσαν ἐς μέσον ἰέμενοι λεχέων:
μόνα δ' εὐλεκτρος ἐν μέσῳ Κύπρις 515
ῥαβδονόμει ξυνοῦσα.

Epode

τότ' ἦν χερρός, ἦν δὲ τό-
ξων πάταγος,

ταυρείων τ' ἀνάμιγδα κεράτων·
 ἦν δ' ἀμφίπλεκτοι κλίμακες, ἦν δὲ μετώ- 520
 πων ὀλόεντα
 πλήγματα, καὶ στόνος ἀμφοῖν.
 ἅ δ' εὐῶπις ἀβρὰ
 τηλαυγεῖ παρ' ὄχθῳ
 ἦστο, τὸν ὄν προσμένον· ἀκοίταν. 525
 †ἐγὼ δὲ θατήρ† μὲν οἷα φράζω.²⁵
 τὸ δ' ἀμφινείκητον ὄμμα νύμφας
 ἔλεινόν ἀμμένει:
 καπὸ ματρὸς ἄφαρ βέβακεν,
 ὥστε πόρτις ἐρήμα. 530

Strophe

Great and mighty is the victory which the Cyprian queen always bears away. The tales of the gods I bypass and do not narrate how she beguiled the son of Cronus, and Hades, the lord of darkness, or Poseidon, shaker of the earth. But, when this bride was to be won, who were the massive rivals that entered the contest for her nuptials? Who stepped forward to the ordeal of battle full of blows and raising dust?

Antistrophe

One was a mighty river-god, high-horned and four-legged, the form of a bull, Achelous, from Oeniadae. The other came from the home of Bacchus, Thebes, brandishing his resilient bow, his spears and club, the son of Zeus. These two then met in a mass, lusting for the marriage bed, and the

²⁵ The text is corrupt at 526: the manuscript has ἐγὼ δὲ μάτηρ μὲν οἷα φράζω ('I speak as a mother speaks') which 'makes no acceptable sense in the context' (Easterling, 1982, p. 138). Jebb's emendation is ἀγών δὲ μαργᾶ μὲν οἷα φράζω ('so the battle rages as I narrate'), while Zieliński (endorsed by Easterling) has ἐγὼ δὲ θατήρ μὲν οἷα φράζω ('I speak as a spectator speaks', with θατήρ the Doric form of θατήρ). Zieliński's emendation works best in my context because it brings out the status of the *choreutai* as a direct eyewitness.

Cyprian goddess of nuptial joy was there with them, acting as sole umpire.

Epode

There was clatter of fists and clang of bows and crash of a bull's horns mixed together; then there were close-locked grapplings and deadly blows from foreheads and loud deep cries from both. Meanwhile the delicate beauty sat on the side of a hill that could be seen from afar, awaiting the husband that would be hers. So the battle rages as I narrate. But the face of the bride which is the prize of the strife awaits the end in piteous anguish. And suddenly she has left her mother, like an orphaned calf.²⁶

The *choreutai* start by introducing the theme of their ode: Cypris (Aphrodite) always wins. They sing in their own voice, in the first person singular ('I bypass', παρέβαν, 500; 'I narrate', λέγω, literally 'I say', 500), and illustrate their maxim with three very short examples: even Zeus, Hades and Poseidon have been beguiled by the goddess of love. They then turn to an *exemplum* that is specific to their time and place: Deianeira, 'this bride' (τάνδ' [...] ἄκοιτιν, 503). The strophe ends with two rhetorical questions about the identity of the two 'massive rivals' (ἀμφίγυοι, 504) who entered the contest for the young woman.

The next two stanzas are taken up by an analeptic account, a flashback to the fight, and here the discourse becomes more impersonal: the contestants are simply 'one' (ὁ μὲν, 507) and 'the other' (ὁ δέ, 510), then 'they' (οἱ, 513). Finally, in the epode, the events are described with the quadruple repetition of 'there was' (ἦν, 517, 518, 520, 521). This is what Chatman (1978) calls 'covert' narration (p. 197) where the narrator is

²⁶ Trans. Jebb, 1908, adapted.

effaced and the description becomes the dominant point of interest: the chorus no longer function as a *dramatis persona* but as a storyteller.

In the antistrophe, the narrative homes in on the two combatants, Achelous and Heracles, giving their provenance and vividly describing their physical appearance: Achelous is 'a mighty river-god, high-horned and four-legged, the form of a bull' (ποταμοῦ σθένος, / ὑψίκερως τετραόρου / φάσμα τάουρου, 507-9), Heracles the son of Zeus, 'brandishing his resilient bow, his spears and club' (τόξα καὶ λόγχας ῥόπαλόν τε τινάσσων, 512). Such contingent detail, that is, detail which is not necessary for the development of the plot, does not usually occur in the episodes (except in messenger speeches) but is common in *diegesis*. The end of the antistrophe indicates the beginning of the contest ('these two then met in a mass', οἱ τότε ἄλλεῖς / ἴσαν ἐς μέσον, 513-14), and appropriately Cypris, the goddess of 'nuptial joy' (εὐλεκτρος, 515), is present as the 'sole umpire' (μόνα [...] ῥαβδονόμει, 515-16).

The epode gives a close-up of the battle (517-22) with both visual and aural detail (visual: fists and bow hitting each other, arms and horns locked together, foreheads coming into contact with each other; aural: clatter, clang, crash, cries). It is as though the chorus, like Cypris, are placed right in the middle of the action. Then, suddenly, there is a spatial leap, from the battle between Heracles and Achelous to Deianeira sitting on a distant hill (524), awaiting the outcome of the fighting. In the final two verses there is a further leap, this time both temporal and spatial, zooming in on the bride who has left home.

As part of the shifts from *mimesis* to *diegesis*, the chorus now display many of what Richardson (1990) calls the 'special abilities' of the Homeric narrator (p. 109ff). First, in the *Iliad*, in descriptions of battle scenes, the narrator usually starts with a bird's-eye view of the situation; he then homes in on the fighting, describing it in detail, and eventually zooms out

again in order to focus on another scene. The beginning of Book 6 (1-12) is a good example of this technique:

Τρώων δ' οἰώθη καὶ Ἀχαιῶν φύλοπις αἰνή·
πολλὰ δ' ἄρ' ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθ' ἵθυσε μάχη πεδίοιο
ἀλλήλων ἰθυνομένων χαλκήρεα δοῦρα
μεσσηγὺς Σιμόεντος ἰδὲ Ξάνθοιο ῥοάων.
Αἴας δὲ πρῶτος Τελαμώνιος ἕρκος Ἀχαιῶν 5
Τρώων ῥῆξε φάλαγγα, φόως δ' ἐτάροισιν ἔθηκεν,
ἄνδρα βαλὼν ὃς ἄριστος ἐνὶ Θρήκεσσι τέτυκτο
υἱὸν Εὐσσώρου Ἀκάμαντ' ἦῦν τε μέγαν τε.
τόν ῥ' ἔβαλε πρῶτος κόρυθος φάλον ἵπποδασείης,
ἐν δὲ μετώπῳ πῆξε, πέρησε δ' ἄρ' ὀστέον εἴσω 10
αἰχμὴ χαλκείῃ· τὸν δὲ σκότος ὄσσε κάλυψεν.
Ἄξυλον δ' ἄρ' ἔπεφνε βοὴν ἀγαθὸς Διομήδης.

So the grim encounter of Achaeans and Trojans was left to itself, and the battle veered greatly now one way, now in another, over the plain as they guided their bronze spears at each other in the space between the waters of Xanthos and Simoeis.

First, Telamonian Ajax, that bastion of the Achaeans, broke the Trojan battalions and brought light to his own company, striking down the man who was far the best of the Thracians, Acamas, the huge and mighty, the son of Eussorus. Throwing first, he struck the horse-haired helmet and the bronze spear-point fixed in his forehead and drove inward through the bone; and the mist of darkness clouded both eyes.

But Diomedes of the great war cry cut down Axylus ...²⁷

²⁷ Trans. Lattimore, 1951, adapted. All the longer translations of Homer in this chapter are by Lattimore (*Iliad*, 1951; *Odyssey*, 1967)

The narrator here starts with an impressionistic overview of the battle, as it rages between the two rivers at Troy (1-4), he then homes in on Ajax fighting with Acamas, giving a very quick sketch of each combatant, one 'that bastion of the Achaeans', the other 'huge and mighty, the son of Eussorus' (5-8). After that he zooms in further, following the course of the spear to describe the injury sustained by Acamas (9-11). Finally, the narrator zooms out and moves to another battle spot and two different warriors: Diomedes and Axylus (12).

The same technique can be observed in the first *stasimon* of the *Trachiniae*: the *choreutai* first simply present the contestant as two 'massive rivals' (504); after that they give us a more detailed portrayal of the combatants (508-13) and a vivid description of the battle itself (518-23). With the word 'meanwhile' (the contrasting δ' in Greek, 523) they zoom out and home in on the next scene, that of Deinaeira on the hill. Like the Homeric narrator, then, the chorus are omnipresent, moving effortlessly between different spaces (the scene of the battle, the distant hill) and different times (the time of the battle, the time of Deianeira's departure).

Secondly, in Homer, the narrator gives quick snap-shots of the minds of some of his characters. In *Iliad* 6, for instance, the Trojan Adrestus is thrown out of his chariot and supplicates Menelaus to spare his life. At the end of his speech, the narrator comments on the effect Adrestus has on Menelaus, briefly allowing us access to the king's thoughts: 'and [Adrestus] moved the spirit in his [Menelaus'] breast' (τῷ δ' ἄρα θυμὸν ἐνὶ στήθεσσιν ἔπειθε, 6.51).

The comments made by the *choreutai* in the *Trachiniae* are similarly concise and insightful. They tell us that Heracles and Achelous are 'lusting for the marriage bed' (ἰέμενοι λεχέων, 514) while Deianeira awaits the end with 'piteous anguish' (ἐλεινόν, 528). Indeed, the chorus have a greater knowledge of the battle than Deinaeira herself who confessed in

the prologue that she was 'struck numb with fear' (ἐκπεπληγμένη φόβῳ, 24) and therefore knows nothing about the struggle.

Thirdly, in Homer, the narrator incorporates motifs and themes in his comments which are important for the epic as a whole. In Book 2 of the *Iliad*, for instance, after the evil Dream has appeared to Agamemnon and told him to arm the Achaeans to take Troy, the narrator tells us (35-40):

τὸν δὲ λίπ' αὐτοῦ	35
τὰ φρονέοντ' ἀνὰ θυμὸν ἃ ῥ' οὐ τελέεσθαι ἔμελλον·	
φῆ γὰρ ὅ γ' αἰρήσειν Πριάμου πόλιν ἥματι κείνῳ	
νήπιος, οὐδὲ τὰ ἤδη ἃ ῥα Ζεὺς μήδετο ἔργα·	
θήσειν γὰρ ἔτ' ἔμελλεν ἐπ' ἄλγεά τε στοναχάς τε	
Τρωσί τε καὶ Δαναοῖσι διὰ κρατερὰς ὕσμινας.	40

And he left Agamemnon
there, believing things in his heart that were not to be accomplished.
For he thought that on that very day he would take Priam's city;
fool, who knew nothing of all the things Zeus had planned to accomplish,
Zeus who was yet minded to visit tears and sufferings
on Trojans and Danaeans alike in the strong encounters.

This short narratorial comment incorporates several important Iliadic motifs: the foolishness of human hope, the gods' power over the fates of mortals, and the misery caused by the war for both parties involved.

Similarly, in the first *stasimon* of the *Trachiniae*, when the *choreutai* call Deianeira 'the delicate beauty' (523), this is not only reminiscent of the queen's comment in the prologue, that she feared that her beauty might end by bringing her pain (25), it also reminds us that Iole is Heracles' captive because her beauty 'bewitched him' (θέλξειεν, 355). Moreover, when the *choreutai* implicitly pity Deianeira (528), this parallels the queen's compassion for all of Heracles' women prisoners of war, but especially for

Iole (307-21). Finally, the violent contest for Deianeira mirrors Heracles' sacking of Oechalia for the sake of Iole (352-54). All these motifs link the fates of Deianeira and Iole and show that the chorus, like the Homeric narrator, are masters of the discourse of the play. Indeed, they even fleetingly draw attention to their ability to make plot decisions. When, at the start of the strophe, they sing 'I bypass [...] and do not narrate' (500), they explicitly choose not to expand on how Zeus, Hades and Poseidon were beguiled by Aphrodite and thus draw attention to themselves as poets: although subservient to the myths of the Greek oral tradition, they assert some independence in their decision to exclude, include, or even invent some details in order to make their story-telling as effective as possible in the new context.²⁸

The chorus's assimilation of the characteristics and abilities of the Homeric narrator has an impact on the authoritativeness of their discourse: the two questions at the end of the strophe may in fact not be rhetorical, but actual, questions directed at an authority outside the story-plane, a request for help, since the *choreutai* as women of Trachis are not up to the task of describing the epic battle between Heracles and Achelous.

This appeal to an external entity is precisely what happens in the *Iliad* where the narrator invokes the Muses before particularly difficult scenes such as the catalogue of ships (2.484-93).²⁹

ἔσπετε νῦν μοι Μοῦσαι Ὀλύμπια δώματ' ἔχουσαι·

ὕμεις γὰρ θεαί ἐστε πάρεστε τε ἴστε τε πάντα,

485

²⁸ Cf. Richardson, 1990, pp. 187-96: Richardson argues that, in Homer, the passages in which the gods sit in council on Olympus 'determining the fates of the mortals and the course of the action' (p. 193) is one of the devices to introduce plot decisions into the epic. In these passages '[the gods] bear much the same relation to the mortals as the narrator bears to his characters' (p. 193).

²⁹ Further appeals to the Muses occur at *Il.* 2.761-2, before the catalogue of leaders, and at 11.218, 14.508, and 16.112, before complex battle scenes.

ἡμεῖς δὲ κλέος οἶον ἀκούομεν οὐδέ τι ἴδμεν·
 οἳ τινες ἡγεμόνες Δαναῶν καὶ κοῖρανοι ἦσαν·
 πληθὺν δ' οὐκ ἄν ἐγὼ μυθήσομαι οὐδ' ὀνομήνω,
 οὐδ' εἴ μοι δέκα μὲν γλῶσσαι, δέκα δὲ στόματ' εἶεν,
 φωνὴ δ' ἄρρηκτος, χάλκεον δέ μοι ἦτορ ἐνείη, 490
 εἰ μὴ Ὀλυμπιάδες Μοῦσαι Διὸς αἰγιόχοιο
 θυγατέρες μνησαίαθ' ὅσοι ὑπὸ Ἴλιον ἦλθον·
 ἀρχοὺς αὖ νηῶν ἐρέω νῆάς τε προπάσας.

Tell me now, you Muses who have your homes on Olympus.
 For you, who are goddesses, are there, and you know all things,
 and we have heard only the rumour of it and know nothing.
 Who then of those were the chief men and the lords of the Danaans?
 I could not tell over the multitude of them nor name them,
 not if I had ten tongues and ten mouths, not if I had
 a voice never to be broken and a heart of bronze within me,
 not unless the Muses of Olympia, daughters
 of Zeus of the aegis, remembered all those who came beneath Ilion.

The Homeric Muses are goddesses (θεαί ἐστε, 485) and therefore possess the authority of divine status;³⁰ they are present at the scene (πάρεστε, 485) and so direct eye-witnesses;³¹ finally, unlike humans, 'who have heard only the rumour' and so 'know nothing' (ἡμεῖς δὲ κλέος οἶον ἀκούομεν οὐδέ τι ἴδμεν, 486), they 'know all things' (ἴστε ... πάντα, 485) and 'remember' everything (μνησαίαθ', 492). The epic narrator on his own would not be able to give a full and accurate catalogue of the ships; he,

³⁰ Cf. Hesiod 'Hymn to the Muses' (*Theogony*, 1-115) for a detailed description of the divine conception of the Muses, as well as their skills and functions.

³¹ See Homer's *Odyssey*, where Odysseus praises the bard Demodocus for his account of the Trojan War saying that it sounds 'as if perhaps you yourself had been present or heard the tale from another' (ὥς τέ που ἢ αὐτὸς παρῶν ἢ ἄλλου ἀκούσας, *Od.* 8.491).

therefore, asks the Muses to speak through him, and it is, in effect, their voice that we hear, not that of the narrator.³²

The rhetorical questions at the end of the strophe of the first *stasimon* of the *Trachiniae* have the same effect: the *choreutai* turn to an entity outside the story-plane, after which they appear no longer simply to be 'women of Trachis'; instead, they are suddenly both omnipresent (they move effortlessly between places and times) and omniscient (they know everything about the participants, even their mental state), and they are able to draw together the different strands of the plot so far (they realise that Deianeira and Iole are connected by their beauty and by the destruction it has brought them). In the contest between Heracles and Achelous, then, another voice intrudes into the choral discourse, a voice that approximates that of the Homeric narrator, and the whole account of the battle is on a different narrative level. To explain what I mean by 'narrative level', I shall turn to Genette's *Narrative Discourse* (1980).

2. GÉRARD GENETTE'S VOICES AND LEVELS OF COMMUNICATION

i. THE FIRST AND SECOND LEVEL OF COMMUNICATION AND THE META-DIEGETIC VOICE

At the beginning of his chapter on 'Voices' (p. 214ff), Genette (1980) draws attention to the fact that, in the *Odyssey*, the hero's adventures are

³² For the custom of appealing or referring to the Muses, apart from Homer and Hesiod, see e.g. the story of Archilochus's initiation (*SEG* 15.517, 22-57), Theognis (237-39 and 249-52), Solon (*fr.* 13W, 1-15), Bacchylides (13.51-2) and Pindar (e.g. *O.* 1. 1121-12, *N.* 3.1-12, *fr.* 150). Plato's *Ion* shows that even as late as the fourth century the Hesiodic idea of the poet as the 'servant of the Muses' (Μουσάων θεράπων, Hes. *Theog.* 100) was still taken seriously. Plato goes even further, saying that poets were not simply divinely inspired (*Ion*, ἐνθεοί, 533e8) but actually 'possessed' (κατεχόμενοι, 533e9), so that they were no longer 'in their senses' (ἐμφορονες, 534a1 and 7) when composing their poetry. For modern scholarship on the use of the Muses by ancient poets, see Sparduti, 1950; Harriott, 1969; Verdenius, 1983; Halliwell, 2011.

recounted by a number of storytellers. In most of the Books we hear the voice of the Homeric narrator; in Books 9-12, however, we perceive another voice, that of Odysseus himself who recounts to the Phaeacians what he has experienced since leaving Troy. After this initial reference to the *Odyssey*, Genette proceeds to analyse Prévost's *Manon Lescaut*, but I shall continue with Homer since he is more relevant to Greek tragedy. Just as in *Manon*, in the *Odyssey* one tale frames the other: the story told by the Homeric narrator frames Odysseus' account in Books 9-12. There are, therefore, two levels of communication: the level of the Homeric narrator who is 'outside' the story, and the level of the storyteller Odysseus who is 'inside', participating in his own tale. Within Odysseus' story, however, there is another short narrative in Book 10, that of Eurylochus, who tells the hero how the companions entered Circe's house and failed to re-emerge (251-60). Here, then, is a third level of communication embedded within the second (Odyssean account), which is itself embedded in the first (the Homeric narrator's story). In Prévost's *Manon*, the Marquis de Renoncourt writing his *Mémoires d'un homme de qualité* is the main frame, and Genette, therefore, calls this the primary or 'extradiegetic' level. From there he proceeds inwards (p. 228), calling the next level 'intradiegetic', the last 'metadiegetic'. I would like to employ the same terminology in my analysis of Greek tragedy but alter the terms because plays work differently from novels. I shall hyphenate my terms to distinguish them from Genette's.

As we saw, in Greek drama most of the action is presented in the 'showing' mode, in *mimesis* and I shall, therefore, call this the primary level of communication. In the first *stasimon* of the *Trachiniae*, however, we noted a shift from the mimetic to the diegetic mode. Moreover, another voice here intrudes into the choral discourse, a voice that speaks from beyond the story-plane, and which I shall, therefore, name the *meta-diegetic* voice. As we saw, this voice displays many of the special abilities of the

Homeric narrator: it moves freely in space and time and even has some access to the characters' minds. This voice, therefore, has a greater knowledge and understanding than the chorus *qua* stage figure.

We can see now that the level of communication has an impact on choral authoritativeness. When operating on the primary level, as a *dramatis persona* or an *intra-diegetic* voice, the chorus are as fallible as any other stage figure; utterances made on the second level of communication, however, are more credible and trustworthy since the meta-diegetic voice, a voice that has a greater insight than the chorus *qua* character, intrudes into the discourse.

As we shall see in the next section, there is a third level of communication above this second, and here a voice with potentially even greater intellectual capacities intrudes into the chorus's discourse. I shall show this with another example from Sophocles.

ii. THE THIRD LEVEL OF COMMUNICATION AND THE EXTRA-DIEGETIC VOICE

Example 2: The second *stasimon* of Sophocles' *Antigone*³³

The second *stasimon* occurs after Antigone has been brought before Creon for burying her brother Polynices despite the expressed prohibition of the king. After a heated argument, Creon condemns both her, and her sister Ismene, to death, and the *choreutai* perform the following ode (583-625):

³³ We shall encounter this ode again in the *Antigone* chapter. My focus there, however, is different. I could here also have chosen the second *stasimon* of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* because there, too, the communication predominantly takes place on the third level. The *Antigone stasimon*, however, simultaneously possesses some of the markers of the meta-diegetic voice and is, therefore, more suitable here.

Strophe A

εὐδαίμονες οἷσι κακῶν ἄγευστος αἰών.
 οἷς γὰρ ἂν σεισθῇ θεόθεν δόμος, ἄτας
 οὐδὲν ἐλλείπει γενεᾶς ἐπὶ πληθος ἔρπον· 585
 ὅμοιον ὥστε πόντιον
 οἶδμα δυσπνόοις ὅταν
 Θρηῖσαισιν ἔρεβος ὕφαλον ἐπιδράμη πνοαῖς,
 κυλίνδει βυσσόθεν 590
 κελαινὰν θῖνα καὶ δυσάνεμοι
 στονῶ βρέμουσι δ' ἀντιπλήγες ἀκταί.

Antistrophe A

ἀρχαῖα τὰ Λαβδακιδᾶν οἴκων ὀρῶμαι
 πῆματα φθιτῶν ἐπὶ πῆμασι πίπτοντ', 595
 οὐδ' ἀπαλλάσσει γενεὰν γένος, ἀλλ' ἐρείπει
 θεῶν τις, οὐδ' ἔχει λύσιν.
 νῦν γὰρ ἐσχάτας ὕπερ
 ῥίζας ὃ τέτατο φάος ἐν Οἰδίπου δόμοις, 600
 κατ' αὖ νιν φοινία
 θεῶν τῶν νερτέρων ἀμᾶ κόνις³⁴
 λόγου τ' ἄνοια καὶ φρενῶν Ἑρινύς.

Strophe B

τεάν, Ζεῦ, δύνασιν τίς ἀν-
 δρῶν ὑπερβασία κατάσχοι; 605
 τὰν οὐθ' ὕπνος αἰρεῖ ποθ' ὃ πάντ' ἀγρεύων,
 οὔτε θεῶν ἄκματοι
 μῆγες, ἀγήρω δὲ χρόνῳ δυνάστας

³⁴ 602 codd. κόνις (dust) with ἀμᾶι meaning 'gathers', 'scrapes together'; Jortin κοπίς (meat cleaver) with κατ' [...] ἀμᾶι (tnesis), 'hacks down'. Griffith, 1999, unlike Lloyd-Jones, 1994, retains κόνις and I have followed his suggestion because the word evokes the guard's speech in the first episode in which he reported that Polynices' body has been covered with dust (κόνις, 256).

κατέχεις Ὀλύμπου
μαρμαρόεσσαν αἶγλαν. 610
τό τ' ἔπειτα καὶ τὸ μέλλον
καὶ τὸ πρὶν ἐπαρκέσει
νόμος ὅδ', οὐδὲν ἔρπει
θνατῶν βιότῳ πάμπολύ γ' ἐκτὸς ἄτας.

Antistrophe B

ἀ γὰρ δὴ πολὺπλαγκτος ἔλ- 615
πίς, πολλοῖς μὲν ὄνασις ἀνδρῶν,
πολλοῖς δ' ἀπάτα κουφονόων ἐρώτων·
εἰδότες δ' οὐδὲν ἔρπει,
πρὶν πυρὶ θερμῷ πόδα τις προσαύσῃ.
σοφία γὰρ ἔκ του 620
κλεινὸν ἔπος πέφανται.
τὸ κακὸν δοκεῖν ποτ' ἐσθλὸν
τῶδ' ἔμμεν ὅτῳ φρένας
θεὸς ἄγει πρὸς ἄταν·
πράσσει δ' ὀλίγος τὸν χρόνον ἐκτὸς ἄτας. 625

Strophe A

Fortunate are they whose lifetime has never tasted evil! For those whose house is shaken by the gods, no part of disaster is wanting, as it marches against the whole of the family; just like the swell of the sea, when darkness runs beneath the water, brought by the dire blast of winds from Thrace, it rolls up from the bottom the black sand and the wind-vexed shores resound before its impact.

Antistrophe A

From ancient times we have seen the troubles of the dead of the Labdacid house falling hard upon one another, nor does one generation release another, but some one of the gods shatters them, and they have no means

of deliverance. For lately the light spread out above the last root in the house of Oedipus; it too is scraped together by the dust of the infernal gods, folly in speech and the Erinys in the mind.

Strophe B

Zeus, what transgression of men could restrict your power? Neither sleep the all-conquering nor the unwearying months of the gods defeats it, but as a ruler whom time cannot age, you occupy the dazzling glare of Olympus. For present, future and past this law shall suffice: to none among mortals shall great wealth come without disaster.

Antistrophe B

For widely wandering hope brings profit to many men, but to many the deception of thoughtless longings; and a man knows nothing when it comes upon him, until he scalds his foot in blazing fire. For in wisdom someone has revealed the famous saying, that evil seems to be good to him whose mind the god is driving towards disaster: but the small man fares throughout time without disaster.³⁵

The first strophe starts by introducing the theme of the song, the evil that befalls some people. This is followed by an explanation ('for', γάρ, 584) which gives us the agent behind the evil: the gods (584). This is further elucidated: such divinely-motivated disasters (ἄτας, 584) are inescapable. Finally, the idea of the house haunted by a curse is made more vivid with an extended simile comparing the inexorable march of ruin to the waves churning up the sands of the seashore in a heavy storm.

In the *antistrophe*, the *choreutai* show the application of the theme to their particular time and space: 'we see' (ὁρῶμαι, 594) how the house of the descendants of Labdacus, grandfather of Oedipus, great-grandfather of Antigone, Ismene, Polynices and Eteocles, has continuously been beset

³⁵ Trans. Lloyd-Jones, 1994, adapted.

with troubles (πήματα, 595). This is followed by a further clarification ('for', γάρ, 598), explaining that even when there seems to be a glimmer of hope ('light', φάος, 600), this is soon extinguished by the gods (601-2).

Strophe B begins with a question in the form of an apostrophe to Zeus: the *choreutai* wonder what 'transgression of men' (ἀνδρῶν ὑπερβασία, 604-5) might try to restrict the god's invincible, eternal power. There follows a *gnōmē*, asserting that wealth always brings disaster (ἄτασ, 614). In antistrophe B, the question is answered indirectly: ambition can be good, but when it overreaches itself, that is, when a man becomes arrogant, it can lead to deception (ἀπάτα, 617), and this can surreptitiously creep up on him. This in itself is elucidated with the claim that, when the gods drive a man towards disaster (ἄταν, 624), he becomes deluded, thinking that something is good when it is in fact evil. The ode closes with the comment that for such a man disaster (ἄτασ, 625) is not far off.³⁶

This *stasimon*, too, has some of the characteristics of Homeric narration that we saw in the *Trachiniae*. First, there is again a shift from *mimesis* to *diegesis*: there is only one example each of a first and a second person verb ('I see', ὁρῶμαι, 594; 'you occupy', κατέχεις, 609), and a second person possessive adjective ('your power', τεάν [...] δύνασιν, 604). Everything else in the ode is in the third person.³⁷ The chorus have become effaced as a stage figure and, as in the *Trachiniae*, the dominant point of

³⁶ Gould, 2001, notes how in this ode, 'the use of the particle γάρ presents the sequence as a reasoned progression, interpreting experience' (p. 409). This may make the discourse *sound* trustworthy but it need not be so in fact.

³⁷ Strophe A: 'the house is shaken' (σεισθῆ, 584), 'no evil is wanting' (ἐλλείπει, 585), 'the wave rolls' (κυλίνδει, 591), 'the shores resound' (βρέμουσι, 593); in antistrophe A, 'no generation releases' (ἀπαλλάσσει, 594), 'some god shatters' (ἐρείπει, 596), 'the Labdacid house has' (ἔχει, 597), 'a light spread out' (τέτατο, 600) but 'is scraped together' (κατ' [...] ἀμᾶ, 601-2); strophe B, 'arrogance could restrict' (κατάσχοι, 605), 'sleep defeats' (αἰρεῖ, 606), 'it is enough' (ἐπαρκέσει, 612), 'disaster comes' (ἔρπει, 613); finally, in antistrophe B, 'deception comes' (ἔρπει, 618), 'it burns' (προσαύση, 619), 'someone has revealed' (πέφανται, 621), 'god drives' (ἄγει, 624), and 'the small man fares' (πράσσει, 625).

interest is the *act* of narration (*how* the message is conveyed) rather than the narrative itself (*what* is conveyed).³⁸

Secondly, the structure of the song is similar to the narration in the *Iliad*: the *choreutai* start by giving a bird's-eye-view of the situation (an unnamed house is shaken by evil, 584-5); they then zoom in (it is the Labdacid house that is in trouble, 594-7), give a close-up (the latest problems of the descendants of Oedipus, 598-602), and zoom out to focus on another issue (human arrogance, 604). The markers of *diegesis* are similar to those in the *Trachiniae*.

Thirdly, the chorus's discourse shows the 'special abilities' of the Homeric storyteller: the life-span of the *choreutai* seems to be extended beyond that of a normal human being since they appear personally to have witnessed the troubles of the Labdacid house for several generations ('from ancient times ... I have seen *for myself* (middle voice), ἀρχαῖα [...] ὁρῶμαι, 594). Moreover, they are able to read the thoughts of others: a member of the Labdacid house has 'the Erinyes in mind' (φρενῶν Ἐρινύς, 603), while for the arrogant man 'evil seems to be good' (τὸ κακὸν δοκεῖν ποτ' ἐσθλόν, 622). The chorus as a narrator are omnipresent and omniscient, and their capacities transcend what we would expect from them as a *dramatis persona*: as in the *Trachiniae*, the meta-diegetic voice intrudes into the discourse.

In many ways, however, this choral ode is quite different from the first *stasimon* of the *Trachiniae*. It is clearly more elaborate, the thought processes are more expansive, the meaning more oblique. In addition, the discourse is stylistically much more intensified. At the end of the first strophe, for instance, the wave simile is extended to six verses (586-93) and, in Greek, includes three compound adjectives: the sea swells with

³⁸ As we will see in the last part of this chapter, even in the diegetic mode, the chorus never become entirely effaced: there are usually subtle indicators that they continue to function as a *dramatis persona*. I shall discuss this issue at the end of the chapter.

δυσπνόοις (literally 'mis-blasts', 587) and the shores are δυσάνεμοι [...] ἀντιπλήγες (literally 'mis-wind [...] blasted-against', 592-3). The rhythm is striking, too. The comparison of curse and wave starts where there is a conspicuous change of metre: after the dactylo-epitrite of the opening verses, the simile begins with two fairly regular iambic dimeters, reflecting the lapping movement of the waves: $\cup - \cup - \cup - \cup - - \cup - \cup - \cup -$ (ὅμοιον ὥστε πόντιον / οἶδμα δυσπνόοις ὅταν, 'like the swell of the deep sea, when darkness runs beneath the water', 585-6). In the next line, however, which describes the violent winds that whip up the sea, three of the long syllables in the iambic metre are resolved. This results in nine consecutive light syllables which powerfully evoke the battering effect of the waves: $\cup \cup \cup \cup \cup \cup \cup \cup -$ (ἔρβεος ὕφαλον ἐπιδράμη, 'it rolls up from the bottom the black sand', 588). Finally, the strophe ends with a number of syncopated iambs that create an irregular rhythm with final heavy beats which, for Griffith (1999), suggest the 'storm's disruption and turbulence' and 'the inescapable pattern of events' (p. 221). Both the metre and language transcend that of every-day communication. They emphasise *how* the message is conveyed and push *what* is being conveyed into second place. A discourse containing such poetic markers displays what Dobrov (1995) calls *discourse irony*: 'the ironical mismatch [...] between a given character (i.e. who he/she is *supposed* to be, [Elders of Thebes in my examples]) and things this character says, does or knows' (p. 56). Further, Dobrov says, such 'discourse irony' is often a symptom of direct or oblique invasion of a character by the voice of the poet' (p. 56).³⁹

Dobrov is writing about Aristophanic comedy but in Sophocles, too, discourse irony, indicates the intrusion of another voice. I prefer, however, not to call this 'the voice of the poet' since the term is often

³⁹ See also Dobrov, 2001: 'The author's presence is revealed in a fictional figure's speech as it departs from, or surpasses, its speaker in intelligence, sophistication, tone, or scope' (p. 35).

associated with a view that was widely held in the nineteenth and early twentieth century that the most important task of the literary critic is 'discovering and delineating the peculiar nature of the poet from his poetry' (Carlyle, quoted in Abrams, 1953, p. 226). Pohlenz, for example, writes in *Die griechische Tragödie* (1930) that in Sophocles' *oeuvre* 'we get a strong sense of his love for the countryside' (p. 159), his 'proud joy for Athens' (p. 159), and his 'living belief in the divinity' (p. 160).⁴⁰ My concern, however, is not with the historical Sophocles but with the different levels of communication and the corresponding voices. Rather than talking about 'the poet's voice', I shall, therefore, borrow another term from Genette and refer to an *extra-diegetic voice* that intrudes into utterances made on the third level of communication.⁴¹ One of its markers is the one suggested by Silk (1999) and which I mentioned earlier: stylistic intensification.

The intrusion of the extra-diegetic voice can be discerned in other ways, too. As in the *Trachiniae*, in the second *stasimon* of the *Antigone*, too, the *choreutai* allude to a major theme of the tragedy: the word ἄτη ('disaster') occurs four times (ἄτας, 584, 609, 625; ἄταν, 624), each time in an emphatic position at the end of the verse. This draws attention to it and suggests that it may be relevant to the play as a whole. As we saw, in the first two stanzas the *choreutai* sing about the curse on the Labdacid house which manifests itself in the disasters (ἄτας, 584) and troubles (πῆματα, 595) that have recurred across several generations. This problem has already been alluded to in previous scenes: when Ismene tried to dissuade Antigone from burying Polynices, she enumerated a number of 'offences' (ἀμπλακημάτων, 51) committed by her parents and her brothers: incest,

⁴⁰ 'Liebe zur Natur schlägt uns entgegen (p. 159); 'stolze Freude an seinem Athen' (p. 159); 'lebendiger Glaube an die Gottheit' (p. 160).

⁴¹ See also Rosenmeyer, 1993, who, in his discussion of the second *stasimon* of the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, talks about the voice of a 'central intelligence' (p. 570) which 'can be tuned in and out as the audience wishes' (p. 571).

self-blinding, and fratricide. Secondly, when the *coryphaeus* chided Antigone for defying Creon, he commented on her 'fierce nature, like her father's' (τὸ γέννημ' ὦμόν ἐξ ὠμοῦ πατρός, 471). He, therefore, alluded to a character trait prevalent across the generations in the Labdacid house: Antigone is not the only member of the family whose actions seem to be influenced by 'the Erinys in the mind' (φρενῶν Ἐρινύς, 603). Like the meta-diegetic voice, the extra-diegetic voice intrudes into the discourse to draw together different strands of the plot so far.

In the next two stanzas, however, the extra-diegetic voice displays an insight that is different from that of the meta-diegetic voice in the *Trachiniae*. First, it creates ambiguity: when, in strophe B, the *choreutai* connect *atē* (614) with the 'transgression of men' against Zeus (ἀνδρῶν ὑπερβασία, 605), with 'widely wandering hope' (πολύπλαγκτος ἐλπὶς, 614-15), and with the 'deception of thoughtless longings' (ἀπάτα κουφονόων ἐρώτων, 617), this can be understood as a further censure of Antigone, of her transgression against the authority of a king who, as he said, reveres Zeus (σέβας, 304) and her deluded hope that her understanding of Justice (Δίκη, 450) is superior to Creon's. The gendering of the transgression against Zeus ('of men', ἀνδρῶν, 605), however, allows for a different interpretation, one that connects the chorus's utterances with earlier scenes that involved Creon: *his* 'arrogance' in condemning Antigone to death, despite her claim that she buried Polynices out of 'piety' (εὐσεβία, 924, 943), and *his* 'widely wandering hope' that he can rule Thebes by personal edict, without what Antigone called the 'unwritten and unfailing ordinances of the gods' (ἄγραπτα κάσφαλῇ θεῶν / νόμιμα, 454-5). Unlike in the *Trachiniae*, the extra-diegetic voice has made the precise application of the chorus's judgement ambiguous, and the chorus's discourse has become multivalent.⁴²

⁴² As we shall see, in chapter 3 I shall propose a different explanation.

Secondly, when, in antistrophe B, the *choreutai* sing about 'deception' (ἀπάτα, 617) and warn that 'a man knows nothing when it comes upon him, until it scalds his foot in blazing fire' (εἰδότηι δ' οὐδὲν ἔρπει, / πρὶν πυρὶ θερμῷ πόδα τις προσάψῃ, 618-19) because 'evil seems to be good to him' (τὸ κακὸν δοκεῖν ποτ' ἐσθλόν, 622), the discourse foreshadows *future* events: for spectators who interpret strophe B as a reference to Creon, it suggests that the king may encounter some calamity and that it is he whose 'wits the god is driving towards *disaster* (*atē*)' (φρένας / θεὸς ἄγει πρὸς ἄταν, 623-4). We would not expect the chorus as a stage figure to be able to sing about the action to come. These statements, therefore, have a proleptic quality⁴³ and, as Genette rightly says, 'all forms of prolepsis, [...] exceed a hero's capacities for knowledge' (p. 205). The extra-diegetic voice has imbued the *choreutai* with a greater insight.

Many critics call this phenomenon irony, and scholars of ancient Greek have especially noted its use in Sophocles and Socrates.⁴⁴ Sedgewick (1935) defines irony as 'in essence [...] a pretence (προσποίησις, *dissimulatio, simulatio*) the purpose of which is mockery or deception of one sort or another' (p. 15). This captures the use of the device in some Sophoclean scenes, for instance, in the dialogue between Agamemnon's children and Aegisthus in the exodus of the *Electra*. It is, however, not the only way irony is employed in Sophocles. Kirkwood (1958), therefore, subdivides the term into more specific types: verbal irony, irony of fate,

⁴³ The very last verse, if we read it with the manuscripts and Griffiths, could then even be a meta-theatrical reference, a hint to the audience that they will only have to wait 'a very brief time' (ὀλιγιστὸν χρόνον, 625) to witness the downfall of the king.

⁴⁴ For irony in general, see Ribbeck, 1876; Thomson, 1926; Sedgewick, 1935; Thompson, 1948; Muecke, 1969; Dresden, 1976. Muecke's first chapter is a concise introduction to the changing use of the term. For irony specifically in Sophocles, see Thirlwall, 1833; Johnson, 1928; Kirkwood, 1958, pp. 247-87; Markantonatos, 1976; Szlezák, 1981; Rosenmeyer, 1996; Goldhill, 2009. For Socrates and irony, see especially Vlastos, 1987 and 1991; Vasiliou, 1999. Gottlieb, 1992, and Gordon, 1996, disagree with some aspects of Vlastos's argumentation.

dramatic irony, and irony of deception (pp. 247-87).⁴⁵ Many critics writing about Sophocles, however, continue to employ the term loosely and without proper definition. I, therefore, prefer to use an expression coined by Bakhtin.⁴⁶

In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1984), Bakhtin uses the term 'double-voiced discourse' and defines it as 'an intention on the part of the author to make use of someone else's discourse in the direction of its own particular aspirations' (p. 193): we have just seen how, for the *choreutai* as a *dramatis persona*, *atē* is the long line of disasters that have befallen Oedipus' family, the latest being Antigone's transgression against the king's edict and her misconception of justice. The discourse, however, is phrased in such a way as to allow a second meaning, one that makes the utterance into a comment on Creon. There are, then, two *lines* of communication: first, there is what semioticians like Elam (1980, p. 35) call a 'transmitter' *within* the story-world who sends a 'signal' to a 'receiver' who is also in the story-world, that is, the chorus and Creon who, unusually, remains on stage during the ode; secondly, there is a 'transmitter' located *outside* the fictive world of the tragedy, what I call the *extra-diegetic voice*, that sends a signal to another 'receiver' who is also outside the story-word: the author and the spectator, respectively.

I say 'author' but, as Booth in *Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961) rightly explains (and as we saw above in connection with 'the voice of the poet'), we can never know the real man or woman from their work, nor can we ever be sure what particular intention they had in their *oeuvre* which they

⁴⁵ Similarly Rosenmeyer, 1996, although his subdivisions are different from Kirkwood's and his writing is not specifically about Greek tragedy.

⁴⁶ Dobrov's 'discourse irony', of course, also contains the word 'irony'. To avoid the confusion inherent in the term, it may be better to call it 'stylistic and epistemological discontinuity'. 'Discontinuity' is an expression used by scholars writing about comedy, e.g. Dover, 1972, p. 59; Silk, 2000, pp. 136-59; and Robson, 2009, pp. 77-82. Silk, 2000, describes 'discontinuity' as 'a sudden switch from a norm to something incompatible with it – and then a switch back again' (p. 138).

hoped might be decoded by what Rabinowitz (1986) calls the 'authorial audience', i.e. the audience the author had in mind when constructing the text' (p. 117).⁴⁷ Booth, therefore, devised the term 'implied author' for the 'implicit picture [we make for ourselves] of an author who stands behind the scenes' (p. 151). It is this 'implied author' who, in effect, is the extra-diegetic voice which we sense in the highly intensified or proleptic passages of the second *stasimon* of the *Antigone*.

There is one final aspect of the extra-diegetic voice that needs discussing: this voice also reveals itself in utterances which cannot be decoded unambiguously. Who or what exactly, for instance, is 'the light [that lately] spread out above the last root in the house of Oedipus' (ἐσχάτας ὕπερ / ῥίζας ὃ τέτατο φάος ἐν Οἰδίπου δόμοις, 598-600) about which the *choreutai* sing in the second *stasimon* of the *Antigone*? Many critics see it as a reference to the hope brought to Oedipus' family by the betrothal of Antigone and Haemon. Why, however, should this bring the curse to an end? Secondly, what is the link between the action of the play and the statement that wealth inevitably leads to disaster (613-14)? These questions have no textual solution at the time of utterance and thus create what Iser (1974) calls *gaps* which spectators have to fill in as best as they can, using information gleaned so far from the play and anything they know about the general direction of the myth.⁴⁸ This is a complex process.

In a chapter entitled 'The reading process: A phenomenological approach', Iser says that 'the literary text is something like an arena in which readers and their author participate in a game of imagination. If the reader[s] were given the whole story, and there were nothing left for [them] to do, then [their] imagination would never enter the field' (p. 275).

⁴⁷ Rabinowitz describes different audience models in articles published in 1977, 1986 and 1995. Silk, 1974, §25, pp. 59-63, and Appendix VIII, pp. 233-5, rejects 'intentionalism', the view that 'certain aesthetic effects are determined by [an author's] intention'.

⁴⁸ See Weiner, 1980, for the view that some spectators may well decide that the discourse is too complicated for them to decode and simply 'readjust [themselves], relax, watch the dancing, and listen to the music, and perhaps ponder what [they have] just seen' (p. 211).

Filling 'gaps', then, is an inherent part of processing the signals sent from the transmitter to the receiver, and Iser shows that this is done 'in a process of anticipation and retrospection' (p. 283): readers (or, in our case, spectators) establish connections between different pieces of information they are given, they then form expectations of how the action may continue, and subsequently modify these expectations in view of new information.⁴⁹ In doing so, they 'strive, even unconsciously, to fit everything together in a consistent pattern, [...] a coherent meaning' (p. 283). They try, then, to work out what Ingarden calls the *gestalt* of the text (quoted by Iser, p. 280), 'the world presented in the work' (p. 277). The presence of such a 'gestalt' presupposes a knowing implied author, so what the reader is in fact doing when filling in gaps, is attempting to read the mind of this knowing implied author or, what Abbott (2002) calls, the 'creative sensibility [that] lies behind the narrative, [the] sensibility [that] has selected and shaped its events, the order in which they are narrated, the characters involved, the language, the sequence of scenes' (p. 95).⁵⁰ This 'creative sensibility', the spectator feels, has the key to all the riddles and is, therefore, the 'ultimate narrative authority' (Fletcher, 1999, p. 29).⁵¹ Self-conscious 'gaps', then, that have no solution at the time of utterance but that sound as though they may be important for an interpretation of the action, are another marker of the extra-diegetic voice.

Let me draw together my findings so far and reflect on how they impact on the authoritativeness of the discourse. First, the chorus of Greek tragedy operate in two different *modes*: in the episodes, where we are

⁴⁹ This model does not account for a process in which the gist of the story is already known to the receiver. Nonetheless, the main conclusions are still valid.

⁵⁰ Abbott actually uses the word 'entity' for 'character' and 'shot' instead of 'scene' because his analysis of narrative includes non-human actors and shots in films. This, however, is not an issue in Greek tragedy and I have, therefore, replaced them with the more common terms.

⁵¹ Fletcher's article is about the choral voice in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* but the principle is the same.

shown the action, the performance is in the *mimetic* mode. In the choral songs, on the other hand, when we are *told* about events, the chorus function in the *diegetic* mode.

Secondly, independently of the mode, utterances in the odes operate on three different *levels*. When the group perform as a stage figure, as an *intra-diegetic* voice, utterances are made on the primary level of communication. When the discourse displays some of the special abilities of the Homeric narrator, that is, when the chorus *qua* narrator possess spatio-temporal freedom, when they can read the minds of some of the characters and, more generally, when their insight transcends that of the chorus *qua dramatis persona*, the communication is elevated to the second level, with the *meta-diegetic* voice intruding into the narrative. Finally, when the discourse is even more highly mediated, when the style is intensified, when there is discourse irony (or what I prefer to call ‘stylistic and epistemological discontinuity’),⁵² when we sense the presence of double-voiced discourse, and when ‘gaps’ require us to attempt to read the implied author’s mind, utterances are on the third level of communication, signalling the presence of the *extra-diegetic* voice. As in the *Odyssey*, then, where separate story-lines are contained within different narratives (Eurylochus’s tale is contained within that of Odysseus, which is contained within the one told by the narrator), so the voices in Sophocles are embedded within each other: the discourse of the chorus *qua dramatis persona* is embedded within that of the meta-diegetic voice, which, in turn, is embedded within that of the extra-diegetic voice.

The narrative level affects the authoritativeness of choral utterances: the knowledge and understanding of the chorus as a *dramatis persona* is as limited as that of any other stage figure. Comments and judgements made where the *meta-diegetic* voice intrudes into the discourse,

⁵² Cf. p. 44, n. 46.

on the other hand, are more reliable since this voice has a greater overview. Finally, evaluations made where the *extra-diegetic* voice is present are at their most trustworthy because the discourse is that of the voice that knows about the *gestalt* of the play: the higher the level, therefore, the greater their authoritativeness, the more we can trust choral utterances as a guide to an interpretation of the action.

I would like to end this chapter with a brief section in which I ring a note of caution about my analysis of the modes and levels of communication. I shall look again at the first *stasimon* of the *Trachiniae* and the second *stasimon* of the *Antigone*, then examine three final examples from Sophocles, one from the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, two from the *Ajax*. They will show that trying to establish the authoritativeness of the choral discourse is much more complex and ambiguous than I have suggested so far.

3. AMBIGUITY OF CHORAL AUTHORITATIVENESS

i. AMBIGUITY OF THE LEVEL OF COMMUNICATION

Earlier I argued that, in the *Trachinae*, the description of the battle between Heracles and Achelous is shown on the second level of communication since the meta-diegetic voice, a voice approximating that of the Homeric narrator, intrudes into the discourse. Two words in the epode, however, create ambiguity: as we saw, the *choreutai* sing about the young woman on the distant hill as the 'delicate beauty' (εὐῶπις ἀβρά, 523) and call her situation 'piteous' (ἐλεινόν, 528). In the *parodos*, too, they showed compassion for the queen, the 'poor woman fearing a miserable fate' (κακὰν / δύστανον ἐλπίζουσιν αἴσαν, 110-11). Their concern continued throughout the first episode, especially in their initial joy at Heracles' safety (205-224, 291-2) and their disapproval of Lichas' lies (383-4, 387-8, 470-71). In their expression of sympathy in the first *stasimon*, then, two

temporal planes merge, that of the *narrated* time, the time of the past contest for the bride-to-be, and that of the *narrating* time, the present in which the chorus support and advise the queen.⁵³ With the words 'delicate' and 'piteous', the *choreutai* fleetingly quit their role as an impersonal narrator and show renewed personal involvement in the action; for a moment, they operate as an *intra-diegetic* voice.⁵⁴

The same is true for the second *stasimon* of the *Antigone*. When the *choreutai* wonder about the many disasters in the Labdacid house, there is a first person verb ('I see', ὁρῶμαι, 594). Later, when they consider the power of Zeus, they address the god, using a second person verb ('you occupy', κατέχεις, 609) and a second person possessive adjective ('your power', τεάν [...] δύνασιν, 604). In this ode, too, the chorus reveal their personal connection with the action, briefly singing as Elders of Thebes. Even in utterances made predominantly on a higher plane, then, the *choreutai* sometimes revert to functioning as an intra-diegetic voice. This produces a momentary shift in the level of communication, making the authoritativeness of their discourse less certain.

There are two further devices that generate such ambiguity. I have already spoken about 'double-voiced discourse' in my examination of the second *stasimon* of the *Antigone* (p. 44). There, however, it is employed in an unusual way because the tragedy has two main stage figures. It is, therefore, worth clarifying its use with a more typical example.

⁵³ See Genette, 1980 p. 33, for the difference between narrated or story time (*erzählte Zeit*) and narrative time (*Erzählerzeit*).

⁵⁴ In the *Iliad*, too, the narrator occasionally intrudes into the discourse to describe a character in emotive terms. In book 18, for instance, he comments on the Trojan's decision not to follow Poloudamas' advice, saying 'fools, since Pallas Athene had taken the wits away from them' (νήπιοι: ἐκ γὰρ σφεων φρένας εἴλετο Παλλὰς Ἀθήνη, 311). Unlike the tragic chorus, however, the Homeric narrator does not straddle two positions; he is not simultaneously a participant in the action and a commentator on the events. His evaluations are always authoritative and made entirely from outside the fictive world: he is used by the extra-diegetic voice to direct the audience's response, without actually being involved in the situation himself.

ii. DOUBLE-VOICED DISCOURSE

As we saw, Bakhtin (1984) defines ‘double-voiced discourse’ as ‘an intention on the part of the author to make use of someone else’s discourse in the direction of its own particular aspirations’ (p. 193). In the *Antigone*, this did not affect the *authoritativeness* of the choral evaluation; it only left it open about whom the *choreutai* were singing. Usually, however, the second line of communication, to quote Bakhtin again, ‘clashes *hostilely* with its primordial host and forces him or her to serve *directly opposing* aims’ (p. 193, my italics): on the surface, the chorus make one claim but the extra-diegetic voice intrudes into the discourse to undermine it, even suggests the very opposite of what they are singing. Let me show how this works by examining a short passage from Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus*.

Example 3: The first *stasimon* of the *Oedipus Tyrannus*

Thebes is suffering from an outbreak of the plague and king Oedipus has sent his brother-in-law Creon to Delphi to find out what has caused the disease and how it can be brought to an end. Creon reports that Apollo is ordering them to punish the man who caused the pollution of the city when he murdered Laius, the former king and late husband of Oedipus’ wife Jocasta (95-107). The seer Teiresias has just accused Oedipus of being this polluter, an accusation the king angrily rejected. In the first *stasimon*, the *choreutai* wonder who may, then, be the man to whom the oracle referred and, in the first antistrophe, they sing the following words (473-82):

ἐλαμψε γὰρ τοῦ νιφόεν-
 τος ἀρτίως φανείσα
 φάμα Παρνασοῦ τὸν ἄδη-
 λον ἄνδρα πάντ’ ἰχνεύειν.
 φοιτᾷ γὰρ ὑπ’ ἀγρίαν

ὕλαν ἀνά τ' ἄντρα καὶ
 πετραῖος ὁ ταῦρος
 μέλεος μελέω ποδὶ χηρεύων,
 τὰ μεσόμφαλα γὰρ ἀπονοσφίζων 480
 μαντεῖα· τὰ δ' αἰεὶ
 ζῶντα περιποτᾶται.

For lately flashed out the word from snowcapped Parnassus that all were to follow the tracks of the mysterious man. Yes, he roams through the wild forests and through caves and rocks, like a mountain bull, limping sadly with sore-wounded foot, trying to leave far behind the prophecies from the navel of the earth; but they hover about him, ever alive.⁵⁵

The *choreutai* are singing about the oracle pronounced at Delphi, below 'snowcapped Parnassus' (τοῦ νιφόεντος [...] / Παρνασοῦ, 471-2), which Creon has recently ('just', ἀρτίως, 474) brought back, and of Oedipus' proclamation a little later in which he ordered the Cadmeans to 'indicate everything' to him (πάντα σημαίνειν, 226) that they know about Laius' murder or else risk being shunned socially and religiously (236-40). The Elders then go on to imagine everyone (πάντ', 474) trying to track down this killer, even while he roams about far and wide to try to evade the prophecies (τὰ [...] / μαντεῖα, 480-1) pronounced at Delphi, 'the navel of the earth' (μεσόμφαλα γὰρ, 480). He will, however, not be able to escape them since they 'hover about him, ever alive' (αἰεὶ / ζῶντα περιποτᾶται, 481-2). The first line of communication indicates that the chorus are at a loss: they do not possess any special insight since they are ignorant as to who the murderer and polluter of their city may be. They perform, then, as an intra-diegetic voice whose comments lack authoritativeness.

⁵⁵ Trans. Lloyd-Jones, 1994, adapted.

Spectators familiar with the myth, however, know that Laius' murderer is not a 'mysterious man' (ἄδηλον ἄνδρα, 476), as the chorus surmise, but Oedipus himself who unwittingly killed Laius at a place near Delphi where three roads meet. There is, then, a second line of communication, one which, to quote Bakhtin's words again, 'clashes *hostilely*' with the surface intention, one that points the finger at Oedipus as the guilty person. The discourse, then, acquires a second, quite different, meaning.

First, in his attempt to flee from the oracle, the murderer is described as a 'bull' (ταῦρος, 478). Kamerbeek (1967) says that 'the bull fleeing into the wilds is a proverbial image' (p. 117). The animal, however, is also connected with anger: in Euripides' *Medea*, for instance, the nurse worries about the safety of her betrayed mistress' children because she sees Medea direct her 'savage glance' at them (ὄμμα [...] ταυρουμένην, literally a 'glance that turns into a bull', 92). In the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, Oedipus similarly 'turned into a bull' when his reverence for Teiresias (300-4) changed to fury as the seer refused to identify the polluter of the city: the repeated use of words from the ὀργή-root ('anger', 'wrath') signalled that rage is a prominent feature of Oedipus' character: 'you would even *enrage* a rock' (ἂν πέτρου / φύσιν σύ γ' ὀργάνειας, 334-5), he told the seer, and 'who would not *rage* hearing such words' (τίς γὰρ τοιαῦτ' ἂν οὐκ ἂν ὀργίζοιτ' ἔπη / κλύων, 339-40). Eventually, he even became 'so *enraged*' (ὥς ὀργῆς ἔχω, 345) that he accused Teiresias of having been involved in planning to kill Laius. When the *choreutai* sing about the polluter of Thebes roaming about like 'the mountain bull' (πετραῖος ὁ ταῦρος, 477), this may be the first signal that the discourse is double-voiced.

Secondly, the *choreutai* imagine the murderer 'limping with sore-wounded foot' (μελέω ποδὶ χηρεύων, literally 'bereft of his useless foot', 479). Oedipus' name literally mean 'swollen-foot' (from οἰδάω, 'swell',

and πούς, 'foot') and we later learn that, when he was exposed as a baby, his ankles were pierced (718, 1034). Again, the second line of communication points to the king as the murderer.

Finally, Oedipus was near Delphi when he killed Laius because he wanted to find out if the Corinthian king and queen, whose son he believed to be, were really his parents because a drunk had claimed that he was not really Polybus' child (280). Instead of an answer, however, he was told that he was destined to kill his father, sleep with his mother, and produce children with her (791-3). To avoid such a terrible fate, or, as the *choreutai* sing in the first *stasimon*, 'to leave far behind the prophecies from earth's centre' (τὰ μεσόμφαλα γὰρ ἀπονοσφίζων / μαντεῖα, 479-80), he decided never to set foot in Corinth again. Instead, he roamed about until he came to Thebes where he solved the Sphinx's riddle and, as a reward, was awarded the hand of Laius' widow who, although he does not know this, is his mother Jocasta. As the *choreutai* sing in the first *stasimon*, prophecies cannot be evaded: 'they hover about you, ever alive' (τὰ δ' ἀεὶ / ζῶντα περιποτᾶται, 481-2). The second line of communication, then, perfectly fits the king and, for spectators who realise that the discourse is double-voice, the chorus's words are trustworthy. They are formulated in such a way, however, as to allow for both lines of communication to be viable. In the end, the true authoritativeness of the choral voice is ambiguous.

The second device I would like to draw attention to is what Bakhtin (1986) calls 'dialogic overtones' (p. 91).⁵⁶ I have already alluded to one aspect of this phenomenon in my analysis of the second *stasimon* of the *Antigone* (p. 41): I said there that the chorus's utterances *evoke* scenes from earlier on in

⁵⁶ For the concept of *dialogism*, see further Holquist, 1990.

the play. The technique is used extensively in Sophocles and, therefore, warrants clarification.

iii. DIALOGIC OVERTONES

In *Speech Genre*, 1986, Bakhtin writes that ‘utterances are aware of and mutually reflect on one another. [...] Each utterance is filled with echoes and reverberations of other utterances to which it is related by the communality of the sphere of speech communication. [...] The utterance is filled with *dialogic overtones*, and they must be taken into account in order fully to understand the style of the utterance’ (p. 91). Bakhtin is here purely writing about the stylistic interplay between different discourses. Subsequently, however, Kristeva (1969) adapted his approach to utterances more broadly, arguing that dialogic overtones also exist across literature and, indeed, across any human discourse. A discourse should, therefore, not only be examined ‘horizontally’ (p. 36), in our case within the setting of a particular play, but also ‘vertically’ (p. 37), with utterances made elsewhere in other literary or, indeed, non-literary contexts.⁵⁷ I shall demonstrate how these types of overtones works with two final passages, both from Sophocles’ *Ajax*. They show how an analysis of ‘intertextuality’ (p. 37), as Kristeva terms it, helps to explain why a discourse that, on the surface, sounds credible can, in fact, be ambiguous or even untrustworthy.

⁵⁷ Cf. Kristeva (1969): ‘The three dimensions or coordinates of dialogue are writing subject, addressee and exterior text. The word’s status is thus defined horizontally (the word in the text belongs to both writing subject and addressee) as well as vertically (the word in the text is oriented towards an anterior or synchronic literary corpus) (pp. 36-7). [...] Any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another (p. 37). To understand any text it is necessary to ‘understand intertextual relationships’ (p. 40).

Example 4: The *parodos* of the *Ajax*⁵⁸ (horizontal dialogic overtones)

The *choreutai* have just entered the *orchēstra* chanting that Odysseus is spreading a terrible rumour about Ajax. They are convinced that he is slandering their leader and express this in the following passage (148-63):

τοιούσδε λόγους ψιθύρους πλάσσων	
εἰς ὦτα φέρει πᾶσιν Ὀδυσσεύς,	
καὶ σφόδρα πείθει· περὶ γὰρ σοῦ νῦν	150
εὖπειστα λέγει, καὶ πᾶς ὁ κλύων	
τοῦ λέξαντος χαίρει μάλλον	
τοῖς σοῖς ἄχεσιν καθυβρίζων.	
τῶν γὰρ μεγάλων ψυχῶν ἰεῖς	
οὐκ ἂν ἀμάρτοις· κατὰ δ' ἂν τις ἐμοῦ	155
τοιαῦτα λέγων οὐκ ἂν πείθοι·	
πρὸς γὰρ τὸν ἔχονθ' ὁ φθόνος ἔρπει.	
καίτοι σμικροὶ μεγάλων χωρὶς	
σφαλερὸν πύργου ῥῦμα πέλονται·	
μετὰ γὰρ μεγάλων βαιὸς ἄριστ' ἂν	160
καὶ μέγας ὀρθοῖθ' ὑπὸ μικροτέρων.	
ἀλλ' οὐ δυνατὸν τοὺς ἀνοήτους	
τούτων γνώμας προδιδάσκειν.	
ὑπὸ τοιούτων ἀνδρῶν θορυβεῖ.	

Such are the whispered words which Odysseus is putting together and carrying to the ears of all, and he is exceedingly persuasive for what he is now saying about you is well plausible, and each listener takes greater pleasure than the teller in your troubles, exulting over you. For when someone shoots at great spirits, he will never miss, though if it were against me he were saying such things he would not win credence; for it is against him who has that envy marches. Yet small men, without the aid

⁵⁸ I have deliberately opted for an example from a tragedy that I shall not discuss later. This type of double-voiced discourse will form an important part of the chapters to come and I wanted to avoid the overlap that would inevitably have resulted if I had selected a passage from one of my chosen plays.

of great men are unsafe guardians of a wall; for little men are best supported by the great and the great by the smaller men. But it is not possible to teach judgement in such matter to fools. Such are the men that clamour against you.⁵⁹

The *choreutai* start by stating two facts: first, that Odysseus is spreading a false report about Ajax (148-9) and, secondly, that he is ‘persuasive’ (πείθει, 150; εὔπειστα, 151). They then dismiss the rumour, arguing that ‘each listener takes greater pleasure than the teller’ (πᾶς ὁ κλύων τοῦ λέξαντος χαίρει μᾶλλον, 151-2): the soldiers in the army enjoy hearing of someone being exposed even more than Odysseus who is spinning the yarn. As an explanation (‘for’, γὰρ, 154), they adduce a wider *gnōmē*: ‘when someone shoots at great spirits, he will never miss’ (τῶν γὰρ μεγάλων ψυχῶν ἰεῖς / οὐκ ἂν ἀμάρτοις, 154-5): it is Ajax’s very nobility that makes him vulnerable to criticism for, as they see it, ‘it is great men against whom envy marches’ (πρὸς γὰρ τὸν ἔχονθ’ ὁ φθόνος ἔρπει, 157). They end their defence with another *gnōmē*, asserting that ‘it is impossible to teach judgement to fools’ (οὐ δυνατόν τοὺς ἀνοήτους τούτων γνῶμας προδιδάσκειν, 162-3): Odysseus’ words are believed, not because they are true, but because of the lack of judgement of ‘such men’ (ὑπὸ τοιούτων ἀνδρῶν, 164) as are clamouring against their leader. The chorus use a concatenation of *gnōmai* and explanations to construct a logical argument which, on the surface, sounds trustworthy.

The discourse, however, evokes the prologue as a whole and a particular utterance within it. When Ajax’s soldiers state that Odysseus’ words are ‘*exceedingly* persuasive’ (σφόδρα πείθει, 150) and ‘*well* plausible’ (εὔπειστα, 151), the two intensifiers actually emphasise the sailors’ lack of insight: in the first scene of the play, the audience witnessed how Athena displayed Ajax to Odysseus, and how the crazed

⁵⁹ Trans. Lloyd-Jones, 1994, adapted.

and blood-spattered man boasted that he killed a number of the leaders of the Greek army and was in the process of torturing others. In reality, however, the goddess clouded his mind with madness so that his victims were, in fact, animals. The *parodos* now enters into a horizontal dialogue with the prologue, and the intensifiers in the *parodos* signal that Odysseus is ‘*exceedingly* persuasive’ and ‘*well* plausible’ because he has seen the evidence with his own eyes, not because, as the sailors imply, he is using twisting rhetoric with the intention of creating ‘whispered words’ (λόγους ψιθύρους, 148).

Secondly, the *choreutai* identify ‘envy’ (φθόνος, 157) as the reason for Odysseus’ enmity towards their leader. In the prologue, however, we saw no trace of jealousy in Odysseus’ attitude to Ajax. On the contrary, whereas Athena believed that her protégé might take pleasure in his enemy’s downfall (79), Odysseus specifically said that he felt ‘compassion’ for the great warrior (ἐποικτίρω δέ νιν, ‘I pity him’, 121), even though the two men are indeed foes (121-2). The two words, ‘envy’ and ‘compassion’, enter into a horizontal dialogue, and this shows that it is Ajax’s men who lack ‘judgement’ (γνώμας, 163) and are ‘fools’ (ἄνοήτους, 162), not the Greek soldiers listening to Odysseus’ news.⁶⁰ the sailors’ comments, then, cannot be taken as a guide to an authoritative interpretation of the action of the play.

My second example is an extract from Menelaus’ speech to Teucer, and the passage allows for several different vertical dialogic overtones. I shall

⁶⁰ Cf. n. 36 on Gould, 2001, and the effect produced by the concatenation of statements and explanations in the second *stasimon* of the *Antigone*. For Aristotle on *gnōmai*, see *Rhetoric*, Book 2, chapter 21. For an analysis of *gnōmai* in Homer, see Lardinois, 1997 and 2000.

only mention two, one literary, Aeschylus' *Eumenides*, the other non-literary, the Athenian performance context.⁶¹

Example 5: Menelaus' *rhēsis* (vertical double-voiced discourse)

After the *parodos*, Ajax recovered from his madness but his sense of shame at having failed in his mission was so intense that he committed suicide. Teucer wants his half-brother to be buried like a hero but the Spartan king Menelaus will not allow this and presents his reasons in a long *rhēsis* at the centre of which are the following words (1071-83):

καίτοι κακοῦ πρὸς ἀνδρὸς ὄντα δημότην	
μηδὲν δικαιοῦν τῶν ἐφεστώτων κλύειν.	
οὐ γάρ ποτ' οὐτ' ἂν ἐν πόλει νόμοι καλῶς	
φέρουσιν ἂν, ἔνθα μὴ καθεστήκη δέος,	
οὐτ' ἂν στρατός γε σωφρόνως ἄρχοιτ' ἔτι,	1075
μηδὲν φόβου πρόβλημα μηδ' αἰδοῦς ἔχων.	
ἀλλ' ἄνδρα χρή, κἂν σῶμα γεννήσῃ μέγα,	
δοκεῖν πεσεῖν ἂν κἂν ἀπὸ σμικροῦ κακοῦ.	
δέος γὰρ ὧ πρόσεστιν αἰσχύνῃ θ' ὁμοῦ,	
σωτηρίαν ἔχοντα τόνδ' ἐπίστασο·	1080
ὅπου δ' ὑβρίζειν δρᾶν θ' ἅ βούλεται παρῇ,	
ταύτην νόμιζε τὴν πόλιν χρόνῳ ποτὲ	
ἐξ οὐρίων δραμοῦσαν εἰς βυθὸν πεσεῖν.	

Indeed it is the mark of a bad man for a subordinate to refuse to obey those in authority. For the laws of the city can never function well where no one is afraid, nor can an army be sensibly controlled, when it does not have the protection of fear and respect. Even if a man has a mighty frame,

⁶¹ As we will see, the *Electra* is full of such vertical dialogic overtones because Sophocles was not the first poet to deal with the killings in the house of Atreus. In this chapter, however, I have chosen an example from a different Sophoclean tragedy, partly to avoid any overlap with the later chapter, partly to demonstrate that the poet uses similar techniques across all, or at least, most of his work.

he must remember that he can be brought down even by small mischief. Know that when a man feels fear and shame, then he is safe! But where he can be insolent and do as he pleases, believe me, that city, though at first it has sailed along easily, will in time sink to the bottom!

Menelaus' main reason for refusing Ajax burial is his claim that those in authority must be obeyed unquestioningly and that a man who does not do so is bad (1071-2). He reinforces this assertion with an explanation ('for, γὰρ, 1073) and a number of maxims (1071-2, 1073-4, 1075-6, 1079-80), asserting, first, that laws in a city only function well if people are afraid (δέος, 1074, 1079) and, secondly, that an army can only be ruled effectively if there is 'fear' (φόβου, 1075), 'respect' (αἰδοῦς, 1075), and a sense of 'shame' (αἰσχύνῃ, 1079). Any infringement or insolence (ὑβρίζειν, 1081), therefore, even by someone like an Ajax, famous for his mighty physique, needs to be punished, not only for the sake of the safety of any individual, but also for that of the city and its army.

The discourse allows for a number of possible *vertical* dialogic overtones. Finglass (2011), for instance, says that the king's speech incorporates ideas expressed by Athena in Aeschylus' *Eumenides* (690-706). There, the goddess asserts that 'reverence' (σέβας, 690, 700) and 'inborn fear' (φόβος [...] ξυγγενής, 691) for the Areopagus, as well as the court's own 'respectful' behaviour (αἰδοῖον, 705), will guarantee justice in Athens and keep the city safe (σωτήριον, 701). A spectator who sees the Aeschylean tragedy as an intertext may, then, accept Menelaus' reasoning because the earlier, persuasive, speech composed by an august poet for a divine figure makes the king's argument in the *Ajax* convincing, too.⁶²

On the other hand, in Aeschylus' tragedy, Athena specifically talks about a *democratic* law court and counsels her citizens to maintain 'a

⁶² A spectator's personal mindset may also play a role. Cf. Pelling, 2000, pp. 199-200.

system which is not despotic' (μήτε δεσποτούμενον, 696). The Spartan king, however, makes 'specious use of *oligarchical* slogans' (Easterling, 1984, p. 8, my italics). This creates possible vertical dialogic overtones with the political context of the fifth-century audience in the theatre of Dionysus. As Barker (2009) says, the 'language taps into Athenian anxieties about authority, particularly the very Spartan kind of unquestioned obedience' (p. 300). Spectators who support the Athenian democratic system, then, are likely to disapprove of Menealus' discourse.⁶³ Despite the use of *gnōmai* and explanations, the king's speech is unpersuasive.

Vertical dialogic overtones, then, can be difficult to gauge because individual spectators may come to different conclusions, depending on which echoes they perceive: this contributes to the multivalence of the discourse.

By way of a conclusion, let me draw together for the last time how the authoritativeness of the choral voice is suggested in Sophocles' tragedies. First, the chorus's discourse can be used most reliably as a guide for an interpretation of a particular scene, even of the tragedy as a whole, when the extra-diegetic voice can be sensed and the communication takes place on the third level. The most conspicuous markers of the extra-diegetic voice are epistemological and stylistic discontinuity, as well as utterances that point to the overall *gestalt* of the play (proleptic pronouncements, ambiguities, *gaps*, double-voiced discourse).

The discourse is on the second highest level of authoritativeness where the meta-diegetic voice is present and the communication takes place on the second plane. The markers here are a gradual or sudden shift to diegesis ('telling' of the action) and a narrative technique

⁶³ The issue of the burial is, of course, also focalised through the eyes of Ajax's *philoi*. This, too, is likely to dispose a spectator against the Spartan king.

approximating that of the Homeric narrator (overview followed by an ever closer focusing in on details). In addition, the *choreutai* display some of the special abilities of Homer's story teller: they are omnipresent (they have temporal and spatial freedom) and omniscient (they have some access to the minds of the stage figures and are able to draw together the motifs and themes that have so far shaped the action).

Finally, the reliability of the choral voice is at its lowest in the mimetic, the 'showing', mode of the action, that is, when the *coryphaeus* takes part in the action in the episodes or when, in the choral odes, the chorus as a whole function as an intra-diegetic voice. This is indicated by linguistic markers, such as first and second person verbs and possessive adjectives, which indicate the involvement of the *choreutai* in the action. Moreover, spectators familiar with the mythological or poetic precedents on which the action is based may also note the limitations of the chorus's knowledge and understanding because their evaluations do not accord with how such audience members know, or expect, the action to proceed.

On the other hand, the precise identification of the authoritativeness of choral comments and judgements is made ambiguous by certain devices, for instance, where there are fleeting glimpses of the intra-diegetic voice in otherwise highly authoritative contexts or when dialogic overtones, either horizontal (arising from echoes from within the tragedy) or vertical (brought about by evocations of other literary or non-literary contexts), undermine the credibility of choral pronouncements or make the discourse multivalent. Overall then, in Sophocles there is a tension in the choral voice between utterances that are, or at least *sound*, authoritative and those that are not.

CHAPTER 2: CHORAL AUTHORITATIVENESS IN THE PHILOCTETES

INTRODUCTION

In chapter 1, I established the markers that make a discourse authoritative by suggesting the intrusion of the meta- and extra-diegetic voice. In this chapter I shall show their presence in one of my chosen Sophoclean plays: the *Philoctetes*. In this tragedy, the language is generally not very elevated; the stylistic intensification which is such an important indicator of authoritativeness, therefore, stands out more clearly than in other Sophoclean tragedies. Before I analyse the play in detail, however, I would like briefly to survey the controversies that it has provoked because they will feature in my discussion later on.

First, scholars disagree on the precise personality of the main protagonists.¹ Most believe that, at the beginning of the play, Neoptolemus is led astray by Odysseus' sophistic argumentation,² but that he returns to his Achillean *phusis* under Philoctetes' influence.³ Nonetheless, critics are divided in their assessment of the young man's decision to take his new friend home to Malis: some see it as a sign of his nobility;⁴ others point out that he is betraying the Greek cause at Troy and defying Helenus' prophecy.⁵

¹ Whether stage figures in Greek tragedy, or fictional figures in modern novels, possess a 'personality' or a 'character', and if so, what sort, is a much disputed question. Cf. Novels: Forster, 1927, especially pp. 71-81; Greek tragedy: Garton, 1957; Easterling, 1977 (specifically in Sophocles) and 1990; Gould, 1978; Gill, 1986, 1990 and 1996 (epic, tragedy and philosophy); Halliwell, 1990. Following Gill, 1986, I am using the term 'personality' here to indicate that Neoptolemus's 'self' (p. 252), at any rate, is not presented as fixed: spectators are invited to try to understand his point of view rather than make 'normative assumptions about [his ...] behaviour' (p. 253).

² Cf. Rose, 1976.

³ Contra Calder, 1971, who calls Neoptolemus 'the archdeceiver' (p. 154) and claims that even the "'Repentance Scene'" is a fraud, staged to deceive Philoctetes' (p. 165).

⁴ Cf. Knox, 1964: 'he sacrifices his own cherished ambition of glory to make up for his shameful conduct' (p. 138).

⁵ Much of the disagreement about the *Philoctetes* results from the presentation of Helenus' prophecy: we are never given a full, authoritative version of the Trojan seer's words. Instead, his predictions are revealed piece-meal and by characters who have a personal

The personal traits of Odysseus and Philoctetes and the ending of the play are also much debated: some critics see Odysseus as a villain through and through;⁶ others acknowledge the difficulty of the challenge facing him.⁷ Similarly, some scholars admire Philoctetes' fortitude in refusing to go to Troy⁸ and argue that Heracles' epiphany does not accord with the overarching shape of the tragedy.⁹ In their view, Sophocles is simply bound by the mythological and poetic tradition to bring Philoctetes to Troy¹⁰ and he, therefore, uses an Euripidean device, the *deus ex machina*, to achieve it. Others see no reason why the warrior should reject the honest appeal of his new friend,¹¹ and they defend both the god's unexpected appearance¹² and Philoctetes' eventual departure to Troy as the true ending of the play.¹³

interest in a particular interpretation. For critical analyses, see Kitto, 1939, pp. 300-1; Bowra, 1944, pp. 261-306; Knox, 1964, p. 191-2, n. 30; Hinds, 1967; Robinson, 1969, especially pp. 45-51; Calder, 1971; and Easterling, 1978a, p. 27. Visser, 1998, examines the play entirely in the light of the prophecy.

⁶ Knox, 1964: he is 'in many respects, a degenerate descendant of the Homeric hero, [...] a fast-talking, cynical politician. [...] The Odysseus of this play has no heroic code which binds him, no standards of conduct of any kind; he is for victory, by any and every means' (p. 124).

⁷ Easterling, 1978a: Odysseus is 'by no means the simple embodiment of evil that he seems to Philoctetes. His goal, after all, is the restoration of Philoctetes in order that Troy shall be taken; this is the goal to which the prophecy points and which is ultimately achieved through the intervention of Heracles' (p. 38).

⁸ Linforth, 1956, on the false departure to Malis near the end of the play: 'Philoctetes [...] has triumphed. Against all temptations he has held to his resolve not to submit to his enemies' (p. 148).

⁹ Linforth, 1956: 'Herakles requires Philoctetes to do precisely what he has persistently refused to do. [...] The tight structure of the play, upon which Sophocles has expended all the resources of his art, is suddenly abandoned' (p. 150).

¹⁰ Cf. Proclus, *Chrestomathy*, 213-14 (= West, 2003, pp. 122-3), Pindar, *Pythian* 1.51-55, and Dio Chrysostom's comparison of the three *Philoctetes* plays, by Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides (especially 52.13).

¹¹ Whitman, 1951: 'as long as he struggles with Odysseus, there can be no question that Philoctetes wins sympathy. When, however, it comes to the contest with Neoptolemus, he may appear less so. To resist one's arch enemy is one thing, but to refuse the earnest and well-meant entreaty of a friend may seem a little less magnanimous' (p. 185).

¹² Bowra, 1944: 'we are raised to harmony and a glad consciousness that the gods' will is after everything to be done. [...] Neoptolemus' self-denial has not been in vain, and Philoctetes' essential nobility, warped by resentful anger in the past, is restored' (pp. 300-1).

¹³ Visser, 1998: 'Das erste Ende ist ohne das zweite auf jeden Fall defizitär' (p. 239).

More importantly for my purpose, the chorus's contribution to the play is also under debate. Although most commentators agree that the sailors fully participate in the action of the play, not everyone goes as far as Kitto (1939) who argues that they are simply 'a minor character in the piece, an Assistant Conspirator' (p. 299). There is also little agreement on their actual personality. For Gardiner (1987), their main trait is 'complete devotion to Neoptolemus' interests. [...] They are neither noble nor honorable, hence their vision and understanding is limited. But they are clearly no utter villains; the moderate amount of pity they display is indicative of their humanity' (p. 46). Other interpreters feel more ambivalent: Winnington-Ingram (1980) suggests that their attitude presents 'a combination of weak pity and strong self-interest' (p. 294, n. 44); Schmidt (1973) comments on their 'lack of scruple and impudence';¹⁴ Schein (2013) calls some of their utterances 'opportunistic falsehoods' (p. 18), 'disingenuous, [...] self-serving and hypocritical' (p. 295). Finally, the deviation from the traditional use of the *choreutai* as performers of choral odes is a point of contention. There is only one *stasimon* in this play. All other songs, including the *parodos*, are, in effect, lyric dialogues between the crew and one of the stage figures.¹⁵ This has an effect on the chorus's discourse: as Schein (2013) notes, they 'rarely rise to a higher intellectual, speculative, or spiritual level [...] and so] do not provide a 'choral' voice with which the audience can associate themselves or make a point of departure for their own thought' (p. 19).¹⁶

¹⁴ 'Unbedenklichkeit und Unverfrorenheit', p. 133.

¹⁵ For comparison, Sophocles' *Electra* has three solo choral odes, the *Ajax* and the two *Oedipus* plays have four, the *Trachiniae* five, and the *Antigone* six.

¹⁶ This was already noted by Dio Chrysostom (AD 1-2) who, as part of his comparison of the three *Philoctetes* plays, wrote that in Sophocles the 'lyrics do not contain much gnomic element or incentive to virtue' (τά τε μέλη οὐκ ἔχει πολὺ τὸ γνωμικὸν οὐδὲ πρὸς ἀρετὴν παράκλησιν, *Oratio* 52.17.5-6). Waldock, 1951, draws the ultimate conclusion. Taking into account the general development of drama in the fifth and fourth centuries, he writes: 'the Chorus [...] is obviously in decline; its heyday is clearly long past. Sophocles puts it through its old paces [...] but what he gives is like an echo of the past.'

My approach to the play will take account of many of these issues but the focus will be somewhat different. First, as Dio Chrysostom noted, there *are* choral passages that contain ‘a marvellous sweetness and magnificence’ (ἡδονὴν δὲ θαυμαστήν καὶ μεγαλοπρέπειαν, 52.17.5-6). I shall show that there is a correlation between such stylistic intensification and the potential credibility of choral utterances. Secondly, I shall discuss how the repeated disruption of the typical tragic form affects our view of the group’s authoritativeness. I shall particularly analyse the impact of the choral silence in the last 250 or so lines of the play. Finally, instead of defending a particular interpretation of individual scenes, I shall show how, again and again, the chorus’s discourse is set up in such a way as to make the precise meaning ambiguous. This regularly allows for two, often seemingly inconsistent, readings and goes some way towards explaining the diverging views on the play.

I shall now analyse the play scene by scene. At times, I shall show how retrospective reflection may lead to a review of initial assessments. I shall always start by giving the context and a short overview of the choral contribution, then analyse the discourse in some detail.

1. THE *PARODOS* (135-219)

The *parodos* takes place after Odysseus has told Neoptolemus about his scheme (σόφισμα, 14) to capture Philoctetes in the prologue. Ten years previously, while on his way to Troy, the warrior had been bitten by a snake at the shrine of Chryse and his wound became infected, ‘dripping with a disease that was devouring his foot’ (νόσῳ καταστάζοντα

This Chorus is a kind of reminiscence; its office is virtually gone’ (p. 209). Not dissimilarly, Kirkwood, 1958: writing about a number of Sophoclean odes, including the *stasimon* in the *Philoctetes*, he comments that ‘these odes need not detain us long. No one is likely to search mistakenly for the dramatist’s clues to the meaning of his play, for they are simple in content and provide no more than a lyrical commentary on their context’ (p. 198).

διαβόρω πόδα, 7). When the Greeks could no longer stand his screams of pain, Odysseus – ‘on the orders of those in command’ (ταχθεὶς [...] τῶν ἀνασσόντων ὑπο, 6) – abandoned the sick man on the uninhabited island of Lemnos. Now, however, the Greeks have learnt from the captive Trojan seer Helenus that they need Philoctetes’ magical bow to conquer Troy. Odysseus has, therefore, come to Lemnos to arrange the return.¹⁷ Since, however, he rightly suspects that Philoctetes feels insurmountable hatred for him, he has enlisted the help of the young son of Achilles to ‘beguile the mind [of the hero] with words’ (ψυχὴν [...] λόγοισιν ἐκκλέψει, 55) and to trick him into sailing to Troy.

The *parodos* that follows consists of three strophic pairs performed in lyric by the chorus of Neoptolemus’ sailors. They alternate with anapaestic passages chanted by their captain. This, in effect, makes the entry song into an *amoibaion*.¹⁸ The young man tells his crew what he has found out from Odysseus about Philoctetes and his life on Lemnos. The *choreutai* seem to be familiar with the general outline of the plot: they know that they have to ‘conceal’ (στέγειν, 136) some details from Philoctetes and that he is a ‘suspicious man’ (ἄνδρ’ ὑπόπταν, 136).¹⁹ They are, however ‘a stranger in a strange land’ (ἐν ξένῃ ξένον, 135) and repeatedly ask their young master for instructions (‘tell me’, φράζε μοι,

¹⁷ At this stage, it is left open if Philoctetes and the bow are needed. The discourse of the prologue concentrates on the bow since its magical qualities pose the greatest danger to Odysseus.

¹⁸ In the seven extant plays of Sophocles there are a number of *parodoi* in the form of an *amoibaion*, namely in the *Ajax*, the *Electra* and the *Oedipus Coloneus*. The *Antigone* is different again: here the whole *parodos* is performed by the chorus, but lyric stanzas sung by the full group alternate with anapaestic passages chanted, probably, by the *coryphaeus* alone.

¹⁹ Some critics, including Webster, 1970, assume that the chorus have ‘overheard’ (p. 79) some of the dialogue between Odysseus and Neoptolemus and have, therefore, been present during the prologue. Gardiner, 1987, discusses the issue at length (pp. 14-16, with bibliography, n. 2).

137; μοι ἔννεπε, '142; μοι / λέγ', 152-3). They do not, then, possess any of the special epistemological insight regularly associated with the chorus.²⁰

This, however, changes in the second strophic pair. Before I discuss it in some detail, I need briefly to return to the main definitions I proposed in chapter 1. As I explained there, a story in the theatre can be conveyed in two basic *modes*: in *mimesis* or *diegesis*. In *mimesis*, the stage figures (including the *coryphaeus*) *show* the action by participating directly in the on-stage representation of events. This is usually the case in the episodes. In the choral odes, however, the discourse sometimes shifts to *diegesis*, and there the chorus *tell* us about events.

Secondly, again as I explained in chapter 1, communication, especially in the choral odes, operates on three different *levels* which affect the authoritativeness of utterances. On the primary level, the chorus continue to perform as a character in the play, as an *intra-diegetic* voice, and their discourse frequently reveals that they have as little knowledge and understanding of the events taking place on stage as any other *dramatis persona*. Their evaluations are, therefore, not reliable.

On the second level, what I call the *meta-diegetic* voice intrudes into the discourse. This voice enables the discourse to move freely in space and time, even giving us glimpses of the minds of characters. The *choreutai* here display many of the special abilities of the Homeric narrator and possess an epistemological insight that transcends that of the chorus *qua* stage figure. Comments and evaluation made on the second level of communication are, therefore, more trustworthy.

²⁰ As we saw in chapter 1, Gould, 1996, believes that there is a connection between social standing and authority. One might, therefore, expect the sailors in this play to possess what he calls 'a privileged presence' (p. 231): they are men not women, free not captives, of a fighting age, not old, and they are, moreover, more experienced than Neoptolemus. Authority, however, is different from authoritativeness: I am interested in examining whether comments and evaluations made by the chorus can potentially be used as a guide for a reliable interpretation of the action. As such authoritativeness is independent of authority.

Finally, some utterances take place on an even higher plane, where a voice entirely from outside the fictive world, an *extra-diegetic* voice, intrudes into the discourse. This voice knows about the overall shape or *gestalt* of the tragedy and can, therefore, hint at it with proleptic utterances. The change of level is often signalled by a more elevated and self-consciously poetic style, and the discourse in such passages suggests some of the themes of the play. Comments and evaluations on the third level of communication are at their most authoritative.

Let me show how these two modes and the different levels of communication work in the *parodos* of the *Philoctetes*. I shall briefly go back to the first strophic pair, then show how the second set of stanzas is different.

In strophe and antistrophe A there is a very high incidence of first and second person pronouns and possessive adjectives ('me', με, 135; 'to me', μοι, 137, 150, 152, 154; 'you', σε, 141; 'to you', σοι, 143; 'your', σῶ, 151): the *choreutai* interact directly with Neoptolemus, referring to themselves and their interlocutor in person. The action is entirely 'shown'; the mode is mimetic.

The level of communication is also low. It is true, at the very start of antistrophe A, there are some poetic markers that slightly elevate the style: there is repetition with rhyme ('*what must, what must I [...] conceal or reveal*', τί χρὴ τί χρὴ με [...] στέγειν ἢ τί λέγειν, 135-6) and a polyptoton ('*a stranger in a strange land*', ἐν ξένῳ ξένον, 135). This, however, is not unusual. As we saw in chapter 1, Silk (1999) writes that all choral lyric employs a 'high style' (p. 2). Only when the *choreutai* use an 'intensified style', however, this 'raises an expectation (no more) that its free discourse carries authority' (p. 17). This intensification, moreover, must not be due to the group's socio-political status or their emotional state at the time of utterance. The poetic markers at the beginning of strophe A, however, are prompted by the context: they reflect the excitement of the *choreutai* at the

prospect of assisting their master and their nervousness at meeting Philoctetes. Nowhere is there any sense, to use my terminology, that a voice from outside the fictive world intrudes into the discourse to guide the spectator in their interpretation of the action. In the first strophic pair, the communication takes place on the primary level.

Strophe and antistrophe B, however, are different. When the *choreutai* describe Philoctetes' life on Lemnos, there is a gradual shift to diegesis. Strophe B still starts with a first-person verb and it is even reinforced with an emphatic personal pronoun ('*I for my part* pity him, οἰκτίρω νιν ἔγωγ', 169). The chorus begin the stanza as an intra-diegetic voice. Soon, however, as they portray Philoctetes' terrible existence on Lemnos, the third person becomes more prominent: '*he is ill*' (νοσεῖ, 173), they sing, and '*he is distraught*' (ἀλύει, 174). Finally, at the end of the antistrophe, there is full narration: '*this man*' (οὗτος, 180) '*lies without a share of anything*' (πάντων ἄμμορος ἐν βίῳ / κεῖται, 182-3), '*and she*' [Echo] (ἃ δ', 188) '*answers his bitter cries of lamentation*' (πικραῖς / οἰμωγαῖς ὑπακούει, 189-90). Across the two stanzas the mode subtly shifts from *mimesis* to *diegesis*.

The level of communication becomes higher, too. In their narration in antistrophe B, the *choreutai* display some of the techniques of the Homeric narrator. As I explained in chapter 1, the Iliadic storyteller tends first to give a bird-eye view of the panorama, usually a battle scene, then homes in on a particular area and gives a close-up of the fighting. Something similar happens in antistrophe B: the *choreutai* first give an overview of Philoctetes' situation on Lemnos (he has no share of anything, 182); they then zoom in on his person (he is alone, 183), and closer still (he lies with beasts, 184-5). Finally, they give a close-up of these animals, describing the colour and texture of their fur: it is '*dappled*' (στικτῶν, 184) and '*shaggy*' (λασίων, 184). The *choreutai* seem to have been present at the scene and this enables them truthfully to narrate events.

We are also given some access to Philoctetes' mind, especially his emotional anguish. In strophe B, we learn that he is 'distraught' (ἀλύει, 174), in the antistrophe that 'he is weighed down with miseries invincible and uncared for' (ἀνήκεστ' ἀμερίμνητὰ τ' ἔχων βάρη, 185-7). The *choreutai* are now no longer men who have just arrived on Lemnos; the meta-diegetic voice intrudes into their discourse, imbuing the singers with the special abilities of the Homeric storyteller. Indeed, their insight is contrasted with Neoptolemus' partial knowledge: in the anapaestic passage just prior to strophe B, the young man admitted that he only knows things by hearsay ('they say', λόγος ἐστί, 165).

The language in this pair of stanzas is different, too: it contains a greater number of poetic markers than before, and they are used to foreshadow the main themes of the play. I shall only mention two.

The first comes from antistrophe B and consists of a single word: after describing Philoctetes' mental anguish, the *choreutai* sing that only Echo replies to his cries of lamentation, and they describe her as 'ever-babbling' (188). In Greek, this is the alpha-privative, compound adjective ἀθυρόστομος, literally 'un-door-mouthed'. It vividly portrays how Echo constantly repeats Philoctetes' cries of pain and grief without ever engaging in a two-way conversation. The adjective is also reminiscent of the Homeric phrase that words escape the 'barrier of the teeth' of a speaker (ἔρκος ὀδόντων, *Il.* 4.350, 9.409, 14.83; *Od.* 1.64, 3.230) which is used to express surprise or anger at this speaker's suggestion or accusation.²¹ The adjective, then, may signal that, at the moments of Philoctetes' greatest desolation and pain, Echo's ever-babbling words

²¹ Cf. Odysseus' response to Agamemnon's accusation of cowardice at *Il.* 4.350, Achilles' rejection of Agamemnon's offer of gifts in the embassy at *Il.* 9.409, and Odysseus' reply to Agamemnon's suggestion that they should leave Troy at *Il.* 14.83. In the *Odyssey*, Zeus uses the phrase to reject Athena's suggestion that he has forgotten Odysseus who is stranded on Circe's island (*Od.* 1.64), Athena employs it to Telemachus when the young man rejects the possibility that Odysseus may yet return to Ithaca and punish the suitors (3.230).

sound like an undeserved accusation which he, however, unlike the Homeric figures, cannot reject since his response is immediately thrown back at him, fuelling further misery. In just one word, the extra-diegetic voice expresses the hero's misery, loneliness and isolation.

My second example is from the strophe and combines repetition with alliteration. After expressing their pity for the sick and lonely man, the *choreutai* sing '*how*, in the name of **h**eaven, *how* does the ill-fated man hold out?' (πῶς πότε πῶς δύσμορος ἀντέχει, 176). The alliteration of the plosive /π/ combined with the repetition of πῶς ('how') is here used by the extra-diegetic voice to draw attention to the chorus's astonishment at the hero's fortitude.

Overall, in the second strophic pair, then, the chorus no longer sound like a stage figure, like sailors and fighting men. Moreover, the poetic markers are no longer prompted by the context, the chorus's excitement or fear. We sense what Dobrov (1995) calls discourse irony, 'the ironical mismatch [...] between a given character (i.e. who he/she is supposed to be), and things this character says, does or knows' (p. 56) or what I prefer to call stylistic and epistemological discontinuity because irony has become such an ill-defined term.²² The extra-diegetic voice is intruding into the discourse, and the communication now takes place on the highest and most authoritative third level.

What does the extra-diegetic voice reveal? First, the discourse emphasises Philoctetes' loneliness on Lemnos and elicits pity for his condition. This foreshadows Neoptolemus' own compassion later in the play. Secondly, when the *choreutai* sing that Philoctetes is 'not inferior to any man of the noblest houses' (πρωτογόνων ἴσως / οἴκων οὐδενὸς ὕστερος, 180-81), they accord him some dignity, something which neither

²² As I explained in chapter 1, Dobrov is actually writing about Aristophanic comedy. The same principle, however, applies to tragedy.

Odysseus nor Neoptolemus have considered so far.²³ This not only raises questions about the plan to trick such a hero but it also prepares for Neoptolemus' eventual disgust with his part in the deception. Finally, the *choreutai* admire Philoctetes' strength of mind and power of endurance in the face of illness and isolation: this foreshadows his heroic resistance later in the play.

At the end of strophe B, the chorus make a judgement. They exclaim, 'ο unhappy race of mortals for whom life is not *metrios*' (ὦ δύστανά γένη βροτῶν, / οἷς μὴ μέτριος αἰών, 178-79). Kamerbeek (1980) translates *metrios* as 'tolerable'. The adjective, however, literally means 'within measure'.²⁴ The extra-diegetic voice thus subtly signals that, later in the play, Philoctetes will partly be to blame when, in his insurmountable hatred of Odysseus and the Atridae, he feels unable to accept the salvation offered to him.

In the final strophic pair, we return to the mimetic mode of the opening of the *parodos*: the *choreutai* suddenly address Neoptolemus again ('be silent', εὔστομ' ἔχε, 201; 'have further thoughts', ἔχε [...] φροντίδας νέας, 210), and there are renewed first person pronouns (205, 207). The sailors return to acting as a stage figure, ready to help their captain with Odysseus' scheme.

Let me sum up what we have discovered about the chorus in the entry song. First, the *parodos* is in the form of an *amoibaion*: this immediately draws attention to the fact that the chorus participate actively in the

²³ See Gagnon, 2016, for the positive presentation of physical disability in the *Philoctetes*.

²⁴ Webster, 1970, relates μέτριος to human prosperity: 'Philoctetes received Herakles' bow, and the possession of this put him in the dangerous class like Agamemnon' (p. 83). Divine envy, however, seems odd since Philoctetes was given the bow as a reward for helping Heracles (801-3). For other critics' interpretation, see the discussion in Avezzù and Pucci, 2003, p. 183. As we shall see, the chorus of the *Electra* similarly accuse the young woman of a lack of moderation (140-41). For this trait of the Sophoclean hero more generally, see Knox, 1964.

events presented in the play. Secondly, their communication is in different *modes*: at the start and the end of the *parodos*, they ‘show’ the action and the mode is, therefore, mimetic; in the central two stanzas, however, the *choreutai* narrate past events and there is a gradual shift to the diegetic mode.

The shift in mode is accompanied by a change in the *level* of communication, and this is indicated by the language. Although in the outer stanzas, the style is slightly elevated, poetic markers here reflect the chorus’s state of mind rather than the intrusion of a voice from beyond the fictive world. The discourse, however, makes it clear that the *choreutai* have no special knowledge or understanding: the level of communication and the resulting authoritativeness of their utterances is, therefore, low.

In the central strophic pair, however, the language suddenly becomes more self-consciously poetic, and the chorus display a deeper insight than they should possess as men who have only just landed on the island: the intrusion of the meta-diegetic voice enables them to narrate Philoctetes’ physical and emotional suffering on Lemnos, while the extra-diegetic voice suggests the themes and the broad *gestalt* of the play: Philoctetes’ beastlike existence on Lemnos, but also his inherent nobility; his terrible suffering, but also his strength of mind; his heroic determination, but also his lack of moderation.

Overall, the discourse of the *parodos* refocuses our attention, drawing it away from the conspirators and directing it on to the victim. This not only prepares for Philoctetes’ entry at the end of the *parodos*,²⁵ it also raises questions about the Odyssean deceit scheme, and points to Neoptolemus’ eventual change of heart.

²⁵ Exactly from where Philoctetes makes his entrance, the cave or one of the *eisodoi*, is disputed. For a discussion, see Robinson, 1967, especially pp. 34-41.

2. TWO LYRIC INTERLUDES (STROPHE 391-402, ANTISTROPHE 507-18)

The two lyric stanzas are performed just over 100 lines apart in the first episode. Each occurs after a major speech, and spectators with some theatrical experience or expertise would probably have expected short, post-*rhēsis* iambic trimeter comments. The strophe is performed after Neoptolemus has told Philoctetes how the Atridae and Odysseus denied him his dead father's arms, the antistrophe after Philoctetes' impassioned supplication to be allowed on Neoptolemus' ship. In both interludes, the chorus display piety while participating in the scheme of deception. This makes the veracity of their discourse ambiguous.

Before I examine these longer songs, I would like briefly to discuss a two-line post-*rhēsis* comment made by the chorus-leader earlier in the episode because the technique used there affects the interpretation of the lyric interludes.

After Neoptolemus has lied to Philoctetes, telling him that he has never heard of him, the warrior recounts how he was abandoned on Lemnos, how his miserable and lonely ten-year exposure was only broken by occasional visitors and how, although they felt sorry for him, they never agreed to take him home. In response, the chorus-leader comments: 'It seems that I too, like the strangers who came here, feel pity for you, son of Poeas' (ἔοικα καὶ γὰρ τοῖς ἀφιγμένοις ἴσα / ξένοις ἐποικτίρειν σε, Ποίαντος τέκνον, 317-18).²⁶ Because of the way the deceit scheme was set up by Odysseus, allowing untruths 'if the lie brings salvation' (εἰ τὸ σωθῆναι γὰρ τὸ ψεῦδος φέρει, 109), this utterance is ambiguous. On the one hand, the verb ἐποικτίρειν ('to feel pity') evokes the *parodos* (169) where, as we saw, the *choreutai* expressed sympathy for Philoctetes. The

²⁶ See Prauscello, 2010, for a discussion of the difference in the *Philoctetes* in the use of the two Greek words for pity, ἔλεος and οἶκτος.

coryphaeus's comment, then, can be interpreted in the same way as Philoctetes does, as a sign of true compassion.²⁷

On the other hand, the chorus-leader's comment starts with ἔουκα: 'it seems that I feel pity' (317). Rather than being a sincere expression of compassion, then, the phrasing suggests (to Neoptolemus and to spectators who notice it) that the *coryphaeus* is feigning pity to help trick Philoctetes and 'to render the aid the present time requires' (τὸ παρὸν θεράπεύειν, 149), as the young man asked his crew to do in the *parodos*. The utterance, then, is double-voiced: as I explained in chapter 1, it contains two lines of communication, each with a separate semantic intention, and this makes it possible for spectators to come to contradictory interpretations.²⁸

With this in mind, let me now return to the lyric interludes. They include similar triggers which signal that the discourse is not necessarily to be read at face value. I shall give the context for each stanza first, then analyse them more closely.

i. THE STROPHE (391-402)

Philoctetes almost immediately falls for Neoptolemus because, although 'in a wild state' (ἀπηργισμένον, 226), he is desperate for human contact (227, 228). His trust increases when he hears that Neoptolemus is the son of Achilles and has, like him, 'suffered outrage' (ἐξελωβήθη, 330, ἐνύβρισαν, 342) at the hands of the Atridae and of Odysseus. Neoptolemus then tells Philoctetes the tale which we saw Odysseus

²⁷ Cf. Adams, 1957: Philoctetes' account 'moves the chorus. Without waiting for his master's voice, the leader exclaims, "I too feel the same pity for you"' (p. 141).

²⁸ As I explained in chapter 1, Bakhtin, 1984, defines 'double-voiced discourse' as 'an intention on the part of the author to make use of someone else's discourse in the direction of its own particular aspirations' (p. 193). For a similar double-voiced discourse in Sophocles, see *Electra* and *Orestes* role-playing for Aegisthus in the exodus of the *Electra* (1448-78). Both in the *Electra* and the *Philoctetes*, the scenes function like a 'play within the play'. On the use of such metatheatrical strategies, see Ringer, 1998, pp. 101-26, and Dobrov, 2001, especially pp. 29-32.

suggest in the prologue. It culminates in how, at Troy, he was ‘deprived of what was mine’ (τῶν ἐμῶν τητῶμενος, 383), his father’s arms, and how he is now on his way back to Scyros ‘after having evil reproaches cast upon me’ (ἐξονειδισθεὶς κακὰ, 382) by Odysseus, ‘the most evil man’ (τοῦ κακίστου, 384).²⁹

Instead of the two-line response with which the *coryphaeus* usually comments on long speeches, the whole chorus now perform a short lyric interlude. They begin by appealing to a divinity that combines attributes of goddesses from both the Greek and the Trojan world: ‘the all-nourishing mountain goddess Earth’ (ὄρεστέρα παμβῶτι Γᾶ, 391), ‘the mother of Zeus himself’ (μᾶτερ αὐτοῦ Διός, 392), and the Phrygian goddess Cybele, ‘you who rule over the river Pactolus rich in gold’ (τὸν μέγαν Πακτωλὸν εὖχρυσον νέμεις, 394) and who ‘sits beside the bull-slaughtering lions’ (ταυροκτόνων / λεόντων ἔφεδρε, 400-1).³⁰ This is a powerful beginning, intended to demonstrate their piety.

The song also displays features of actual contemporary prayer: the *choreutai* name the deity, give her attributes, describe the area of her

²⁹ The veracity of this speech has been much discussed, especially the question whether Odysseus may indeed have refused Neoptolemus his father’s arms. At the two extremes are Adams, 1957, and Calder, 1971. Adams believes that Neoptolemus avoids any ‘literal untruths’ (p. 142) and that Odysseus did indeed keep Achilles’ arms. This is rejected by most critics, because it goes against the epic tradition as reported in Proclus’s argument of the *Little Iliad*, according to which ‘Odysseus, after fetching Neoptolemus from Scyros, gave him his father’s armour’ (Νεοπτόλεμον Ὀδυσσεὺς ἐκ Σκύρου ἀγαγὼν τὰ / ὅπλα δίδωσι τὰ τοῦ πατρὸς, *Chrestomathy*, 217-18) (= West, 2003, pp. 120-1). Moreover, the respect Neoptolemus shows for Odysseus in the prologue would be odd if the two men had had such a serious altercation. For a more detailed discussion, see Knox, 1964, n. 30, p. 191-2, and Visser, 1998, pp. 89-91. Calder, on the other hand, asserts that the entire speech is a lie. He believes that the chorus refer to the original award of the arms to Odysseus in favour of Ajax and that ‘the choral oath, therefore, is no perjury’ (p. 159) (see also Knox, n. 33, p. 192). In my view, this is unlikely since nothing in the choral discourse alerts us to this possibility. In the end, however, Schein, 2013, is right when he writes that ‘there is no way to know which details of [Neoptolemus’] speech are to be taken as “true” and which “false”’. Such ambiguity is typical of the *Philoctetes* and, as we shall see in the chapters that follow, of Sophocles in general.

³⁰ See Avezzù and Pucci, 2003, on the fifth-century fashion of syncretism of different divinities. For a more extended example, see the second *stasimon* of Euripides’ *Helen*, (1301-68).

control, and indirectly remind her of their past relations.³¹ This establishes a connection between the fictive world of the tragedy and the actual, contemporary, cultic world of the fifth-century audience.³² The fact that a simple post-*rhēsis* comment by the chorus-leader is expanded into a full lyric stanza creates what Bakhtin (1986) calls ‘dialogic overtones’, making the prayer sound trustworthy because it is reminiscent of a genuine ritual act outside the theatre.³³

In my view, however, this song, like the *coryphaeus*’s earlier two-line comment, is double-voiced. Philoctetes (and some spectators) will be convinced: the chorus’s show of piety makes their words sound credible, and the warrior now believes that Neoptolemus’ tale is a ‘clear token of [your] grief’ (σύμβολον σαφές / λύπης, 403-4) and proves that ‘you are in harmony with me’ (μοι προσάδεθ’, 405). As in the earlier comment by the *coryphaeus*, however, the discourse allows for a different reading. After their appeal to the goddess, the sailors assert that they previously invoked her, too, when the ‘insolence’ (ὑβρις, 397) of the sons of Atreus came against their young captain as the kings awarded Achilles’ arms to Odysseus. The reference to Achilles’ weapons evokes the prologue and acts as a reminder that this is how Odysseus set up the scheme. Interpreted in this way, the chorus are operating as co-conspirators and performing what sounds like a true prayer in order to help ensnare Philoctetes’ mind. In both readings, however, they perform simply as a *dramatis persona*.

³¹ See Furley and Bremer, 2001, vol. 1, pp. 50-64, for the typical features of hymns and prayers.

³² Cf. Henrichs, 1994/5, for an analysis of self-referentiality in Sophoclean choral odes.

³³ Indeed, even a number of modern critics find it difficult to accept that a chorus may be lying and they try to find ways of extricating them from the accusation of perjury. For a detailed analysis of the different interpretations, see Bers, 1981, and Visser, 1998, pp. 118-20.

ii. THE ANTISTROPHE (507-18)

The antistrophe is performed some 100 lines later, after Neoptolemus has told Philoctetes about the great heroes who have already fallen in the Trojan war: Achilles (331), Ajax (412), Nestor's son Antilochus (424-5), and Patroclus (434-5). The wicked warriors, on the other hand, have survived: Diomedes (416), Odysseus (416), and Thersites (442, 445).³⁴ The young man concludes that 'war never willingly destroys a villain but always noble men' (πόλεμος οὐδέν' ἄνδρ' ἐκὼν / αἰρεῖ πονηρόν, ἀλλὰ τοὺς χρηστοὺς αἰεί, 436-7). It is not clear whether he really holds this view but it certainly chimes with the abandoned warrior who responds with a similarly pessimistic opinion: 'if we survey divine actions we find that the gods are evil (τὰ θεῖ' ἐπαινῶν τοὺς θεοὺς εὖρῳ κακοῦς, 452). The two men seem to have much in common. It is only natural, therefore, that, when Neoptolemus announces that he will now continue his journey to Scyros, the lonely man falls on his knees (485) and supplicates him (470, 484, 495), begging him to take him, too, arguing that 'for noble men what causes shame is detestable and what is good brings fame' (τοῖσι γενναίοισι τοι / τό τ' αἰσχρὸν ἐχθρὸν καὶ τὸ χρηστὸν εὐκλεές, 475-6). Like Odysseus, he appeals to what he believes to be the young man's *phusis*, his inborn nobility, his goodness, and his sense of shame, as well as his desire for fame and glory.³⁵

³⁴ Again, Neoptolemus may be mixing truth and lies. First, Proclus's summary of the *Aethiopis* suggests that Thersites was actually dead by this time, killed by Achilles for taunting him for his supposed love of Penthesilea (*Chrestomathia*, 178-81 = West, 2003, pp. 110-11). Secondly, as O'Higgins, 1989, comments, Neoptolemus fails to mention that Ajax committed suicide after the original judgement of Achilles' arms: Odysseus has in effect appropriated Ajax's story for his own ends (p. 43). Again, the discourse includes trigger, encouraging spectators to analyse utterances carefully.

³⁵ At the moment, Philoctetes' supplication plays into Neoptolemus hands. Later, however, when the son of Achilles has to decide between becoming a traitor to the Greek army or supporting his new friend, Philoctetes' rhetoric, in my view, becomes more problematic. For a similar view and a detailed examination of Neoptolemus' *phusis*, see Blundell, 1988.

It is now that the chorus perform the antistrophe to the earlier strophe. Again, the stanza represents an expanded post-*rhēsis* comment, and, here too, the sailors function as a *dramatis persona*: they appeal to their ‘lord’ (ἄναξ, 507, 510) to ‘take pity’ (οἴκτιρ’, 507) on the hero. Next, they suggest that, in Neoptolemus’ place, they would turn the evil which he suffered at the hands of the Atridae into ‘benefit’ (κέρδος, 512) for Philoctetes and ‘convey him to where he wants to go, [...] to his home’ (ἐνθαπερ ἐπιμέμονεν, / [...] πορεύσαιμ’ ἄν ἐς δόμους). By complying with the warrior’s supplication, they themselves will also ‘escape the righteous anger of the gods’ (τὰν θεῶν / νέμεσιν ἐκφυγών, 517-18).

Again, the discourse is double-voiced: the appeal to pity can be read at face value, as Philoctetes does, and after Neoptolemus has agreed to take him on board, the warrior effusively thanks both him and his crew. At the same time, however, there are signs that the *choreutai* are role-playing: first, the renewed reference to Achilles’ arms is another reminder of the prologue. Secondly, the view that actions should bring ‘benefit’ (κέρδος, 512), echoes Odysseus’ rationale. In the prologue, he told the doubting Neoptolemus that ‘when you are doing something for *benefit*, it is fitting not to hesitate’ (ὅταν τι δοῖς εἰς κέρδος, οὐκ ὀκνεῖν πρόπει, 111). The chorus’s suggestion that Philoctetes’ supplication should be granted to escape the gods’ righteous anger, then, like their ‘prayer’ in the strophe, may not be a sign of piety but a ruse to help their captain get Philoctetes on board his ship. Again, however, the use of double-voiced discourse allows individual spectators to come to different conclusions.

Let me summarise what we have learnt from the two lyric interludes. First, the sudden eruption into song by the whole group to replace the traditional short, spoken, post-*rhēsis* comment by their leader must have come as a surprise to spectators familiar with the structure of tragedies. This may, initially, have induced them to interpret the words as

trustworthy. In both stanzas, however, the *choreutai* perform *qua* stage figure: they play an active role in the on-stage events, and the use of lyric does not necessarily make their discourse authoritative.

Secondly, the sailors' utterances are formulated in such a way as to make them double-voiced. Philoctetes only hears the surface meaning: he accepts the prayer and the sailors' response to his supplication as a sign of piety and friendship. At the same time, however, the choral discourse evokes the prologue and suggests that it need not be read at face value: the sailors may be helping their captain to further the plot and may even be prepared to subvert traditional religious ritual to achieve their aim.

This impacts on the potential trustworthiness of the choral voice: in the *parodos*, the authoritativeness of the discourse was ambiguous because the epistemological insight of the *choreutai* shifted between different strophic pairs. In the two lyric interludes, there has been no such change: here, it is the very veracity of the utterances that is at doubt. This raises the question whether, from now on, the choral discourse, whether spoken or sung, can be trusted at all.

3. THE STASIMON (676-729)

Although spectators would not know this when watching the performance, the *stasimon* is the only conventional choral ode in the *Philoctetes*. It takes place after the hero's initial preparations to board Neoptolemus' ship have been interrupted by the appearance of a character whom we already encountered in the prologue: there, Odysseus told his ward that, if he took too long to dupe Philoctetes, he would send back 'the same man' (τὸν αὐτὸν ἄνδρα, 128) to 'speak cunningly' (ποικίλως αὐδωμένον, 130) so that Neoptolemus might draw 'the benefits' (τὰ

συμφέροντα, 131) he could from the words.³⁶ This False Merchant, again mixing truths and lies, now reveals that Neoptolemus and Philoctetes are being pursued by the Greeks, Neoptolemus by Phoenix and the sons of Theseus (561-2),³⁷ Philoctetes by Odysseus and Diomedes (570, 592). He then gives an account of how the Trojan seer Helenus was caught by Odysseus and displayed to the Greek army, how the prophet foretold that the Greeks could not take Troy unless they brought Philoctetes from Lemnos ‘persuading him with words’ (πείσαντες λόγῳ, 612), and how Odysseus volunteered to fetch the hero either ‘willingly’ (ἐκούσιον, 617) or, if necessary, ‘involuntarily’ (ἄκοντα, 618).³⁸ This speech confirms Philoctetes in his hatred of Odysseus (628-34) and makes him even more determined to leave Lemnos to evade capture by his enemy.³⁹ After a further outpouring of gratitude, he promises Neoptolemus that, ‘because of your excellence’ (ἀρετῆς ἕκατι, 669), he will in the future be allowed to ‘handle’ (θιγγάνειν, 667; ἐπιψαῦσαι, 669) the bow. The two men then go into the cave to get Philoctetes’ few possessions, leaving the stage empty.

³⁶ The audience would recognise this man’s mask on his return. This, in my view, makes it unlikely that the False Merchant is in fact Odysseus in disguise, as Errandonea, 1955a, and Roisman, 2001 and 2005, suggest.

³⁷ Budelmann, 2000, writes that the False Merchant ‘violates the mythological tradition’ (p. 98) ‘since in the *Little Iliad* it was Diomedes, in Aeschylus Odysseus, and in Euripides Odysseus and Diomedes who went to fetch Philoctetes’ (p. 99). Cf. Proclus *Chrestomathy*, 211-13 (= West, 2003, pp. 120-1), and Dio Chrysostomus, 52.14.2 (= Crosby, 1946, pp. 348-9). He argues that such deviations from ‘the force of the myth’ (p. 100) are a way of engaging spectators. The mention of Phoenix also evokes *Iliad* 9 where Phoenix, Odysseus and Ajax visit Achilles to try to convince him to return to the fighting. Cf. Beye, 1970.

³⁸ The False Merchant’s rhetoric was set up as ‘cunning’ (130) in the prologue: it, therefore, has a particular purpose and we need to be careful not to treat this version of Helenus’ oracle at face value, especially the information that the Greeks must bring Philoctetes to Troy ‘of his own free will’ (ἐκούσιον, 617) and by ‘persuading him with words’ (πείσαντες λόγῳ, 612). Cf. Robinson, 1969, p. 49, and Budelmann, 2000, p. 114. Contra Bowra, 1944, especially pp. 264-8.

³⁹ The False Merchant’s speech also increases Philoctetes’ aversion to Troy (624-5) and thus ultimately contributes to the failure, even by Neoptolemus, to persuade the warrior to go to Ilium. Moreover, it affects the son of Achilles: he suddenly seems to have doubts about tricking Philoctetes and states that the winds are against them (639-40, 642). Although his actual motivation is left open, Philoctetes certainly dismisses adverse weather as a reason to delay their departure (643-4).

Spectators with some theatrical experience or expertise might have expected the *stasimon* that follows to include some evaluation of the progress of the conspiracy. Instead, in the two strophic pairs, the *choreutai* focus almost entirely on Philoctetes' suffering, thus again focusing our attention on the victim of the deceit plot. Let me start by giving a brief overview of the ode.

In strophe A, the chorus try to find a character from myth whose fate is comparable to that of the warrior. They can, however, only think of a figure who is totally different.⁴⁰ In the next two stanzas, they sing in detail about Philoctetes' ten-year existence on Lemnos: in antistrophe A, they describe his lack of companionship and the physical and emotional impact of his sickness; in strophe B they portray the absence of good sources of nutrition and his reliance, instead, on food caught with his bow and drink from stagnant puddles. In the antistrophe, finally, the *choreutai* rejoice that Philoctetes will now finally be able to go home.

The contrast between the first three stanzas and the last, especially the fact that, although alone in the *orchestra* and so under no compulsion to continue with their lies, the chorus sing that Philoctetes is going to Malis when he is actually being taken to Troy, has puzzled many critics. An analysis of the mode and level of communication, however, makes the change less startling. Let me show this in more detail. I shall start with the *mode* of communication.

In strophe A, the discourse reflects the personal viewpoint of the chorus and stresses their inability to understand the reasons behind Philoctetes' suffering: throughout the stanza, there are a number of first-

⁴⁰ Although never named, the *choreutai* here probably sing of Ixion who murdered his father-in-law but was purified by Zeus and welcomed to Olympus. There, he tried to seduce Hera and, in Pindar's version, was punished 'by spinning round and round on a feathered wheel' (ἐν πτερόεντι τροχῷ / παντᾶ κυλινδόμενον, *Pythian* 2.22). For more detail, see Gantz, 1978 and 1993, pp. 718-20. This particular subcategory of the 'mythological *exemplum*', the 'mythological hyperbole', Davies, 2001, says, also shows 'the uniqueness of Philoctetes' suffering' (p. 55).

person verbs and pronouns: ‘I have heard’ (ἐξήκουσ’, 676) but ‘I have not seen’ (ὅπωπα δ’ οὐ, 676), the chorus begin their ode as they sing about a man who ‘once approached the bed of all-powerful Zeus’ (τὸν πελάταν λέκτρων ποτὲ τῶν Διὸς, 677-8) and was punished by being ‘bound on a whirling wheel’ (κατ’ ἄμπυκα δὴ δρομάδ’ δέσμιον, 679-80). Philoctetes, however, they continue, is different, again underlining their personal standpoint: ‘I for my part’ (ἐγὼ γ’, 682) know of no one else with ‘a destiny [...] more hateful’ (μοίρα / [...] ἐχθίονι, 862-3). They end the stanza with another first-person pronoun: ‘amazement holds me’ (θαῦμά μ’ ἔχει, 687) that Philoctetes ‘has endured a life so full of tears’ (πανδάκρυτον οὕτω βιοτὰν κατέσχευ, 689-90). The mode of communication is mimetic: the chorus are singing as an intra-diegetic voice, as the crew of Neoptolemus’ ship who find it impossible to work out the root cause of the hero’s plight.⁴¹

Antistrophe A and strophe B, however, are different: as the *choreutai* describe the deprivations of Philoctetes’ life, the verbs are in the third person of impersonal narration: ‘he was his own neighbour’ (αὐτὸς

⁴¹ In Sophocles, myth is invoked at moments of great stress and always in scenes that include the chorus, i.e. in the *Antigone*, in the *kommos* (824-31, Niobe) and the fourth *stasimon* (944-87, Danae, Lycurgus, and Cleopatra); in the *Electra*, in the *parodos* and the first *stasimon* (150-52, Niobe; Procne, 148-9, 1077), and the *kommos* (837-48, Amphiarus and Alcmaeon); in the *Philoctetes*, in the *stasimon* (676-9, Ixion). The myth is adduced each time to provide a *comparandum* for the suffering of the protagonist. It does, however, always fail: it is either rejected by the stage figure herself (Amphiarus and Alcmaeon in the *Antigone*) or the chorus (Niobe and Procne in both the *Antigone* and the *Electra*), because the *choreutai* admit that the *exemplum* is inappropriate (*Philoctetes*), or they are divided in their assessment of the action (Danae, Lycurgus, the sons of Phineus, and Cleopatra in the *Antigone*). On the primary level of communication, then, myth is not used to provide an authoritative comment to help guide the interpretation of the action but rather as a means of showing the inability of the chorus to make sense of it. For a different focus, see the two articles by Gould and Goldhill, both 1996: Gould writes that the chorus adduce myth ‘to mobilise the inherited gnomic wisdom of social memory’ (p. 233). For him, however, this does not actually make such a discourse authoritative. Goldhill, on the other hand, says that he finds it ‘hard to imagine disinvesting such wisdom of all authority’ (p. 253). For other scholarly discussions of myth in Greek poetry and historiography, see Canter, 1933; Willcock, 1964; Finley, 1965; Braswell, 1971; Kirk, 1972; MacLeod, 1974; Stinton, 1990; Demoen, 1997; Gould, 1999 and 2001. In the conclusion of this thesis, I shall come back to the supposed authoritativeness of mythical *comparanda* in Sophocles.

ἦν πρόσουρος, 691); there was no one ‘beside whom *he* might weep aloud’ (παρ’ ᾧ [...] / ἀποκλαύσειεν, 694-5); ‘*he* moved slowly’ (εἶρπε, 701) so that ‘*he* might obtain’ (ἀνύσειε, 711) food with his bow; for ten years ‘*he* did not delight’ (ἥσθη, 715) in any wine, but ‘*he* put his lips’ (προσενώμα, 717) only to standing water. The mode of communication changes in the central stanzas: it becomes diegetic.

The *level* of communication also shifts. First, the discourse displays the same narrative technique of the Homeric narrator that I described in my discussion of the *parodos*: at the end of strophe A, we are given an overview of Philoctetes’ lonely life, how he used to ‘listen, alone, to the waves crashing on the beach around him’ (ἀμφιπλήκτων / ῥοθίων μόνος κλύων, 688-9). The antistrophe amplifies this broad portrayal: Philoctetes had no ‘neighbour in his misery’ (ἐγχώρων κακογείτονα, 693) who might share his ‘groaning’ (στόνον, 694). Then, the narrator zooms in, giving a close-up of the ‘wound of his beast-infested foot’ (έλκέων / ἐνθήρου ποδός, 698) precisely at the moment when the ulcer bursts with ‘the hottest gush of blood bubbling forth’ (τὰν θερμοτάταν αἱμάδα κηκιομέναν, 696-7). The sailors are not just imagining the detail; it is later confirmed during Philoctetes’ paroxysm (783-4, 824-5). The meta-diegetic voice intrudes into the discourse, raising the level of communication to a higher plane.

In addition, there are a number of conspicuous poetic markers, especially in antistrophe A. They suggest the presence of the extra-diegetic voice, alluding to the themes and the *gestalt* of the play. First, Philoctetes’ ‘groaning’ (στόνον, 694) is qualified by three adjectives: ἀντίτυπον (694, literally ‘beating-against’), βαρυβρῶτ’ (695, literally ‘deep-gnawing’) and αἱματηρόν (695, ‘blood-stained’). As Schein (2013) comments, ‘the compression of meaning is extraordinary’ (p. 233): ἀντίτυπον (‘beaten-against’) not only evokes the crashing of the waves against the Lemnian shore (ἀμφιπλήκτων, 687), it is also a reminder of Echo in the *parodos*

(188-90): as we saw, the hero's lamentations there constantly bounce back at him, with his own voice and Echo's in effect 'beating against' each other. The next adjective, βαρυβρῶτ' ('deep-gnawing'), hints at the complexity of Philoctetes' disease: it is a combination of physical pain and profound hatred of Odysseus and the Atridae (257-9, 311-16). Finally, αἱματηρόν ('blood-stained') functions as a visual symbol of Philoctetes' disease and the lack of effective treatment: it reminds us of the rags 'full of matter discharged from a grievous sore' (βαρείας του νοσηλείας πλέα, 39) which Neoptolemus discovered in the prologue. Moreover, it evokes Philoctetes' comment that his personal ingenuity provided him with everything he needed to survive on the island – 'except a cure for my disease' (πλὴν τὸ μὴ νοσεῖν ἐμέ, 299).⁴² Such a concise three-word summary of the living conditions of the hero no longer sounds like the *ad hoc* expression of the sailors' view. It is highly crafted and shows the hand of the extra-diegetic voice. In just three words, it is able to summarise Philoctetes' condition: his lack of companionship, his isolation, and the absence of a remedy for his physical and mental suffering. The discourse thus indirectly suggests the possible advantages of a journey to Troy: a return to civilisation, an end to loneliness, and a release from his illness. This foreshadows Philoctetes' inner fight when Neoptolemus, speaking truthfully, later tries to convince his friend that coming to Troy can only be beneficial to him (1314-47).

The second passage I would like to discuss is from the end of antistrophe A. The *choreutai* comment that the warrior used to look for a means with which to ease his condition 'when the *atē* that ate out his heart had a respite' (ἀνίκ' ἐξανεΐη δακέθυμος ἄτα (705). *Atē* is a difficult word to translate. I already mentioned it in chapter 1, in connection with the

⁴² Clarke Kosak, 2006, comments that, in his own narrative, 'Philoctetes praises himself for the quality of endurance. [...] He seems to contrast his strong inner nature, his endurance and good heart, with his outer appearance of helplessness and passivity' (p. 59). The choral discourse here, on the other hand, stresses his vulnerability.

second *stasimon* of the *Antigone*, but there I concentrated on one of its meanings: disaster or ruin. The concept, however, is more complex and I shall analyse it in some detail in the *Antigone* chapter because it is a recurrent theme in that tragedy. For the *Philoctetes*, a briefer discussion will suffice.

Scholars often assume that the meaning of *atē* changed over time. In Homer, so Dodds (1951), ἄτη is a state of mind – a temporary clouding or bewildering of the normal consciousness, [...] a partial and temporary insanity' (p. 5). 'In Sophocles, and even more in Euripides', however, Sommerstein (2013) writes, '*atē* often means merely "disaster, ill-fortune" with no particular reference to its cause, not even an ironic one' (p. 11). In my view, however, the Homeric overtones are still present in the choral comment on Philoctetes' plight: *atē* hints at his clouded mental state, his obsession with Odysseus and the Atridae who, he imagines, 'gladly' (ἄσμενοι, 271) abandoned him on Lemnos and 'quietly mock' him (γελῶσι σῖγ', 258).⁴³ Indeed, the qualifying adjective in the *stasimon*, δακέθυμος (literally 'biting his *thumos*', his heart or mind, 705), reinforces this idea of *atē*. Nowhere in the play, however, is there any indication that the Greek leaders felt any pleasure at abandoning Philoctetes on Lemnos: in the prologue, Odysseus told Neoptolemus that it was the wounded man's 'savage' (ἀγρίαις, 9) and 'ill-omened' (δυσφημίαις, 10) screams that lead to his expulsion.⁴⁴ Under the influence of *atē*, then, Philoctetes is imagining an additional injustice that adds to the pain he is already enduring from his wound. There is a hint that his suffering is, at least partly, self-inflicted. This complicates the issue of compassion and foreshadows Neoptolemus' argument towards the end of the play that 'men must by necessity bear the fortunes given to them by the gods'

⁴³ See Gottlieb, 2004, for an exploration by a psychoanalyst of Philoctetes' 'spite, self-injury and attachment to misery' (p. 672).

⁴⁴ Philoctetes himself refers to these reasons but dismisses them (1032-3).

(ἀνθρώποισι τὰς μὲν ἐκ θεῶν / τύχας δοθείσας ἔστ' ἀναγκαῖον φέρειν, 1316-17). On the other hand, if, as he says, they 'willingly inflict damage on themselves' (ἐκουσίοισιν ἔγκεινται βλάβαις, 1318), as Philoctetes does, they do not deserve 'pity' (ἐποικτίρειν, 1320).

Let me now turn to the end of the *stasimon* which many interpreters find problematic. At the very start of antistrophe B, the discourse returns to the present time: with the words 'but now' (νῦν δ', 718, also 'but as it is'), we are back in the conspiracy. The verbs, too, show this: they are in the future tense ('[Philoctetes] *will* obtain', ἀνύσει, 720) and the present ('[Neoptolemus] *is* bringing him', νιν [...] / ἄγει, 722-4). This establishes a contrast between the deprivations suffered by the hero over the last ten years and the joy he will soon experience. Moreover, when the sailors sing about the coming journey 'in a seafaring ship' (ποντοπόρῳ δούρατι, 722), they are implicitly referring to the plot against Philoctetes. They are, then, performing as a character in the play and, as in the first stanza, the mode of communication is mimetic. This makes their sudden abandonment of pity less striking.⁴⁵

As we saw in chapter 1, however, in Sophocles the precise mode and level of communication is often more ambiguous, and the last stanza is a case in point. First, the verbs are still in the third person ('*he* will obtain', 720; '*he* is bringing him', 722-4): the narration is carrying on although, as we have just seen, the chorus now function as an intra-diegetic voice. This makes the mode ambiguous. Secondly, the style continues to be slightly elevated: Heracles, for example, is not named but simply evoked in the epithet 'the man of the brazen shield' (ὁ χάλκασπις

⁴⁵ A number of critics, for instance Burton, 1980, p. 238 and p. 249, and Kitzinger, 2008, pp. 134-5, comment on the apparent inconsistency of the chorus's attitude to Philoctetes: their pity in parts of the *parodos* and *stasimon*, and their lack of compassion elsewhere. As my analysis has shown, however, this change does not constitute real inconsistency; instead, it indicates the different levels of communication and the intrusion of the voices from beyond the fictive world. In the conclusion of this thesis I shall propose another possible explanation.

ἀνήρ, 727). Moreover, the precise manner of his apotheosis, the way in which ‘he approaches the gods as a god’ (θεοῖς / πλάθει θεός, 727-8), and especially Philoctetes’ role in igniting the pyre, is only hinted at, again with an epithet: Heracles is ‘radiant with divine fire’ (πυρὶ παμφαίης, 728). Here, too, then, we sense the intrusion of the extra-diegetic voice. Indeed, as Tarrant (1986) notes, the discourse foreshadows the action to come: ‘the assertion that Philoctetes will become *megas* (721) and *eudaimōn* (720) is [...] validated in an unexpected way. These words, which must seem vague and hyperbolic in the context of the deception-plot, acquire their proper weight when they are restated in the final scene with the full authority of Heracles (1421-25)’ (p. 129). Eventually, as the chorus *qua* chorus predict in the *stasimon*, Philoctetes will be able to count himself ‘lucky’ (εὐδαίμων, 720) for having fallen in with the son of Achilles: he will return to Oeta ‘after a multitude of months’ (πλήθει / πολλῶν μηνῶν, 722-3) and will have been made ‘great’ (μέγας, 721) by conquering Troy with Neoptolemus.

Let me summarise what we have learnt from the *stasimon*. First, instead of commenting on the intrigue, the *choreutai* focus almost entirely on Philoctetes: as in the *parodos*, the discourse directs our attention and empathy away from the plotters on to the target of the conspiracy.

Secondly, also as in the *parodos*, there is a shift in the mode and level of communication, and this affects the authoritativeness of the choral discourse. In strophe A, the mode is *mimetic*: the repeated use of first-person verb forms and pronouns indicates that the chorus are performing as an *intra-diegetic* voice. In the central stanzas, however, there is a change: as the *choreutai* describe Philoctetes’ life on Lemnos, the mode becomes *diegetic* and the discourse displays some of the features of the Homeric storyteller.

The shift in mode is accompanied by a change in the *level* of communication. In strophe A, the discourse takes place on the primary level: the *choreutai* stress their inability to find an adequate explanation for Philoctetes' suffering. Even the mythological *comparandus*, Ixion, is the very opposite of the hero: his agony is justified because he is being punished for a terrible crime; Philoctetes, however, has done nothing wrong. In the first stanza, then, the epistemological insight of the *choreutai* is limited.

In antistrophe A and strophe B, on the other hand, the communication takes place on a higher plane: the chorus suddenly display a knowledge and understanding of Philoctetes' physical deprivations and mental anguish that transcends what they should possess as men who have only just arrived on the island. Their insight now approximates that of the Homeric narrator. This signals the intrusion of the *meta-diegetic voice*.

At the same time, especially in antistrophe A, there are passages with peaks in stylistic intensification: it is here that the *extra-diegetic voice* makes itself felt, stressing what Philoctetes' life has been lacking during his ten-year existence on Lemnos: companionship, medical attention, and the comforts of civilisation.

In addition, as in the *parodos*, there is a suggestion that the hero is partly to blame for his misery: by falsely imagining his enemies' glee at his suffering he himself is adding to the pains of his physical affliction. While again evoking pity for the hero, then, the *stasimon* has a different emphasis from the *parodos*: earlier, the discourse drew attention to Philoctetes' heroic endurance; now it suggests that a release from Lemnos might be good for him. The hatred he earlier displayed for the Greek leaders, however, suggests that it will prove difficult for him to relent. It thus paves the way both for Neoptolemus' attempt at persuading his friend willingly to come to Troy and for Philoctetes' inability to come to terms with the wrongs done to him.

Finally, antistrophe B is phrased in such a way as to make both mode and level of communication ambiguous: on the one hand, the particles ‘but now’, the change of verb tenses, and the renewed reference to the intrigue make the mode mimetic: the *choreutai* are again performing as sailors participating in the conspiracy. The precise motivation is left open, but if Philoctetes and Neoptolemus emerge from the cave at the beginning of the stanza, as Jebb (1898) suggests,⁴⁶ then the discourse is again double-voiced: Philoctetes only perceives its surface-meaning, the promise to be taken home; Neoptolemus, however, realises that the sailors are role-playing to further the intrigue.

At the same time, however, antistrophe B continues to display some of the markers of impersonal narration and to be stylistically elevated, particularly in the verses describing Heracles’ apotheosis. In retrospect, this indicates the intrusion of the extra-diegetic voice, foreshadowing the god’s epiphany at the end of the play (1409-44). It also hints at Philoctetes’ actual return home beyond the ending of the tragedy, after the conquest of Troy.⁴⁷

Overall, in the *stasimon* we see once more how the intrigue continues to create uncertainty of meaning. Spectators are thus encouraged not to react purely emotionally to the details of Philoctetes’ suffering but to analyse the discourse carefully, examining its trustworthiness as mode and levels of communication shift.

⁴⁶ Similarly, the more recent commentaries by Avezzù and Pucci, 2003, p. 240, and Schein, 2013, p. 228. Schmidt, 1973, thinks ‘der Chor [singt] das Lied wenigstens in der Annahme, daß Ph[iloktet] es hören könne’ (p. 132).

⁴⁷ Cf. Davies, 2001: ‘The two mythical figures, Ixion and Heracles, symmetrically stationed at the beginning and end of the *stasimon*, set a seal, as it were, upon the ode’s task of looking backwards and forwards. These two heroes who ascended to Olympus symbolize the best and worst of human capacities’ (p. 58).

4. THE LYRIC DIALOGUE (IN PLACE OF A SECOND *STASIMON*) (827-64)

The lyric dialogue takes place after we have witnessed the terrible reality of Philoctetes' disease: in the second episode, the hero suffered increasingly intense spasms of pain which were accompanied by inarticulate howling, just as described by Odysseus in the prologue (9-10) (ἀᾶ, ἄᾶ, 732, 739, 782; ἀπαππαπαῖ, παπαππαπαππαπαππαπαῖ, 746; παππαπαππαπαῖ, 754; παπαῖ, φεῦ, 785; ἀτταταῖ, 790; ὦμοι μοι, 796).⁴⁸ In his agony, he begs Neoptolemus to cut off his heel (ἄκρον πόδα, 748) and hands him the bow to guard until he wakes up from the sleep that always follows such paroxysms (763-6). As the ulcer bursts and his foot's 'bubbling dark blood is dripping from the depth' (στάζει [...] μοι φοίνιον τόδ' ἐκ βυθοῦ / κηκῖον αἶμα, 783-4; cf. 696-7), he calls on Death (ὦ Θάνατε Θάνατε, 797) and beseeches Neoptolemus to burn him with the fire of the Lemnian volcano (799-800), an action similar to the one he himself performed for Heracles and for which he was awarded the bow that Neoptolemus is now holding.⁴⁹ He then entreats the young man not to abandon him while he lies unconscious, and Neoptolemus, assuring him that 'I have been in pain long since, lamenting for your woes' (ἀλγῶ πάλαι δὴ τὰπὶ σοὶ στένων κακά, 806), promises to stay, sealing this undertaking with a right-hand pledge (813).⁵⁰

As Philoctetes sinks to the ground, the chorus intone what at first appears to be a second *stasimon*. The song consists of two responding

⁴⁸ This lends some credence to Odysseus' report that the Greeks abandoned Philoctetes because their libations and sacrifices were disturbed by the injured hero's 'savage words of ill-omen' (ἀγρίαις [...] δυσφημίαις, 9-10). As I said in the introduction, Sophocles presents the ethical issues in a subtle manner, showing the merits and demerits of both sides. For a discussion of how realistically Philoctetes' lameness and pain may have been represented on stage, see Robinson, 1969, pp. 34-42.

⁴⁹ As Budelmann, 2000, points out, Philoctetes' entreaty poses a 'threat' (p. 107) to the mythological tradition. The parallel with Heracles, which Philoctetes himself draws, evokes Sophocles' treatment of that hero's final agony in the *Trachiniae*, especially his desperate appeal to those around him to kill him.

⁵⁰ See Belfiore, 1993, for the view that a relationship of *xenia* now connects Philoctetes and Neoptolemus.

stanzas and an epode, but it is interrupted once, after the strophe, by four hexameter lines chanted by Neoptolemus. This in effect makes it into a lyric dialogue. Let me start with a brief summary of the ode.

Strophe A begins like a cletic hymn to Sleep in which the *choreutai* ask the god to come as a healer. In the second half of the stanza, however, they suddenly address Neoptolemus and suggest that they ought to act. The young man, however, refuses to make off with the bow, replying that it is Philoctetes whom god wants brought to Troy. In the antistrophe, the *choreutai* assure him that this will be accomplished by god but that he should complete his mission. In the epode, after Neoptolemus' silence and his failure to take up their advice, they become even more insistent, telling their young captain, that, since Philoctetes lies unconscious, it is time to act.

The sudden change from a religiously inspired song to the realities of the intrigue has troubled many critics.⁵¹ What in my view is more surprising, however, at least initially, is that the chorus suggest an action that is inconsistent with the *gestalt* which their discourse suggested in the most authoritative stanzas of the *parodos* and the *stasimon*. Moreover, it goes against the mythological and poetic tradition which demands that Philoctetes himself go to Troy. If we examine the mode and level of communication in the ode to Sleep, however, and compare it with the stanzas where the sailors recommend stealing the bow, the clash becomes less arresting.

The chorus begin their hymn after Neoptolemus has asked them to leave the hero in peace 'so that he may fall asleep' (ὥς ἄν εἰς ὕπνον πέσῃ, 826). When they address the god Hypnos (Ὑπνε, 827), therefore, they seem to be acting *qua* stage figure participating in the deceit plot. The discourse of the lullaby, too, remains firmly rooted in the present moment:

⁵¹ For a detailed discussion of the views of different scholars, see Visser, 1998, pp. 135-6.

there are no shifts to impersonal narration. Finally, two first-person pronouns ('may you [Sleep] come to *us*', ἡμῖν ἔλθοις, 828-9; 'come, come to *me*', ἴθι ἴθι μοι, 832) suggest that the *choreutai* have a personal interest in the arrival of the god: with Philoctetes asleep, Neoptolemus will, after all, be fully in charge of the bow.⁵² The sailors, then, sing the lullaby as a stage figure furthering the conspiracy.

At the same time, however, there are aspects of the Sleep song that signal the intrusion of the extra-diegetic voice. First, the hymn evokes contemporary religious ritual. Although it is true that in the lyric interludes the sailors also expressed their piety in order to assist their captain, there the divinity they evoked was not one the audience would have recognised: she was an invented syncretic combination of different goddesses. The song to Hypnos, however, is different. After their initial appeal, the *choreutai* mention Sleep's attributes: he is 'ignorant of pain, [...] and of griefs' (ὀδύνας ἀδαής [...] δ' ἀλγέων, 827). As Avezzù and Pucci (2003, p. 254) say, this recalls an actual hymn, the *Homeric hymn* to Asclepius, where the god of medicine is given the epithet 'soother of cruel pains' (κακῶν θελκτῆρ' ὀδυνάων, *h. Hom.* 16.4). Moreover, when the *choreutai* request that Hypnos 'may hold over Philoctetes' eyes this *radiance* that is now stretched out before them' (ὄμμασι δ' ἀντίσχοις / τάνδ' αἶγλαν, ἃ τέταται τανῦν, 831), the verses evoke a contemporary hymn-type, the *paeon*, one of whose functions was to ward off disease. As Swift (2010) says, such hymns frequently contain 'words meaning 'bright' or 'shining' (for example ἀγλαός and compounds) [...] [since] light is often used figuratively to mean 'safety', 'victory' or, of a person, 'saviour'' (p. 68). The tag at the end of the song, 'come, come to me, Paeon' (ἴθι ἴθι μοι, Παίων 832), is also characteristic of *paeans*. Haldane (1963), therefore, believes that 'the short hymn must at every point have recalled to

⁵² First-person pronouns are, however, not unusual in cletic hymns (cf. Sappho, *fr.* 1.25-7).

Sophocles' audience the liturgy of the new cult of Asclepius' (p. 56).⁵³ The song, then, creates dialogic overtones between the fictional world of the play and the extra-dramatic world of the theatre audience. The sailors as a *dramatis persona* obviously do not know about Athenian cultic practices; the use of a *paean*, therefore, signals the intrusion of a voice from outside the drama.

Secondly, the style of the hymn to Hypnos is elevated. After their initial appeal to the god, the *choreutai* sing, 'may you come to us blowing favourably, happy in life, happy in life, lord' (εὐαῆς ἡμῖν ἔλθοις, / εὐαίῳν εὐαίῳν, ὦναξ, 828-30). In Greek, these lines contain a string of repeated long vowels and diphthongs (ā, ē, ī, ō, eu, oi, ai), resulting in fifteen consecutive heavy syllables which slow down the pace and draw attention to the request.⁵⁴ The rhythm of the next lines continues this pattern: as the *choreutai* express the wish 'may you keep this radiance upon his eyes' (ὄμμασι δ' ἀντίσχοις / τάνδ' αἴγλαν, 830-1), seven of the nine syllables are heavy. As the *choreutai* qualify this radiance, the rhythm suddenly changes and there is conspicuous alliteration of /τ/ (ἅ τέτραται τανῦν, 'that is now stretched out', 831). The song is highly crafted, again suggesting that the extra-diegetic voice is intruding into the choral discourse.

As we have seen in the *parodos* and the *stasimon*, this sort of stylistic intensification encourages a reading that goes beyond the surface meaning. Here, there is an obvious emphasis on the need for Sleep to come to help Philoctetes' recovery from his paroxysm. For the 'radiance upon his eyes' to continue, however, a greater cure is required. By evoking Asclepius, the *paean* encourages spectators familiar with the epic tradition to remember that it was the sons of the god of healing who treated

⁵³ Sophocles himself may have been involved in the cult of Asclepius (Lefkowitz, 1981, pp. 82, 85). For the possible impact on the audience of the temple of Asclepius just above the Theatre of Dionysus, see Mitchell-Boyask, 2007.

⁵⁴ Cf. Katz, 2013, on the importance of vowels in cultic contexts.

Philoctetes at Troy.⁵⁵ The *paean*, then, foreshadows the action to come: Neoptolemus will later tell his friend that he will never have respite from his ‘severe illness’ (νόσου βαρείας, 1330) unless he comes to Troy to be restored to health by the sons of Asclepius. Heracles will improve on this prediction, announcing that it will be the god of healing himself who will bring about the cure (1437-8).⁵⁶ In the end, then, just as the hymn to Hypnos suggested, the wind *will* be ‘blowing favourably’ (εὐαίης, 828) for Philoctetes, and he *will* become ‘happy in life’ (εὐαίων, 830) because, as Heracles will tell him, he will conquer Troy with Neoptolemus and return to the land of Oeta, having been awarded ‘the prize of the best and bravest of the army’ (ἀριστεῖ [...] στρατεύματος, 1429): the extra-diegetic voice foreshadows the action to come.

Let me now turn to the rest of the song, the chorus’s exhortation to steal the bow, and see if there is any evidence of the extra-diegetic voice there. First, the *choreutai* repeatedly address Neoptolemus, calling him ‘my son’ (τέκνον, 833, 843, 845, 855; παῖ, 863). They are performing as the crew of Neoptolemus’ ship, directly addressing their captain and emphasising his youth so as to pressurise him into accepting their suggestion. The pronouns and verb forms, too, indicate that the reference is to the intrigue: in the strophe, the sailors sing, see ‘how there should be some care *for me* regarding *what comes next*’ (πῶς δέ μοι τὰντεῦθεν / φροντίδος, 834-5) and ‘why are *we* waiting to *act*’ (πρὸς τί μενοῦμεν πράσσειν, 836); in the antistrophe, ‘look out how *you* will *secretly accomplish* that thing *for me*, that thing *for me*’ (κεῖνο δὴ μοι, κεῖνο μοι λαθραίως / ἐξιδού ὅπα πράξεις, 850-1). The sailors remind Neoptolemus of the mission that has brought

⁵⁵ Cf. Proclus’s argument of the *Little Iliad*, *Chrestomathy*, 213 (= West, 2003, pp. 122-3): ‘[Philoctetes] is healed by Machaon’ (ἰαθεῖς δὲ οὗτος [Φιλοκτήτης] ὑπὸ Μαχάονος). According to Apollodorus, it was Machaon’s brother Podalirius who cured him (‘having gone and been cured by Podalirius, Philoctetes shoots Alexander’ (ὁ δὲ παραγενόμενος καὶ θεραπευθεὶς ὑπὸ Ποδालειρίου Ἀλέξανδρον τοξεύει, *Epitome*, E.5.8).

⁵⁶ Neoptolemus’ ‘mistake’ also retrospectively shows that his construction of the future is not authoritative.

them all to Lemnos. Although, as Avezzù and Pucci (2003) point out, ‘the key words, such as ‘leave’ and ‘bow’, are never uttered’ (p. 255),⁵⁷ the intention is clear from the context: when the *choreutai* sing that Neoptolemus is to act ‘secretly’ (λαθραίως, 859) and to reply to them with ‘a whispered utterance of words’ (βαιάν [...] / λόγων φάμαν, 844-5) since ‘in disease, unsleeping sleep is sharp-sighted’ (ἐν νόσῳ εὐδρακῆς / ὕπνος ἄϋπνος, 847), this is to prevent Philoctetes from overhearing the conversation, should he still be conscious.⁵⁸

Finally, although there are some passages with clusters of poetic markers, their function arises from the immediate context. At the end of the strophe, for instance, the *choreutai* sing that ‘the right moment, decisive in all judgements, wins many, many a victory in a moment’ (καιρός τοι πάντων γνώμαν ἴσχων / πολὺ τι πολὺ παρὰ πόδα κράτος ἄρνυται, 837-8). The first line is made up of nine heavy syllables; then the metre changes to highly resolved dochmiacs, and there is repetition (‘many, many’, πολὺ, πολὺ), alliteration of the plosive /π/ (πολύ, πολύ, παρά, πόδα) and a wordplay on ‘foot’ (παρὰ πόδα, ‘in a moment’, literally, ‘beside a foot’). Clearly, the sailors as a stage figure would not be able to come up with a sentence containing so many poetic markers. Here, however, the devices simply draw attention to the chorus’s view that it is important to take advantage of ‘the right moment’ (καιρός, 837) and, therefore, reflect their impatience at Neoptolemus’ lack of initiative. There is no indication that the elevated style signals the intrusion of the extra-diegetic voice.

Indeed, in the epode, the wording itself shows that the choral recommendation is not authoritative, that the extra-diegetic voice is not intruding to imbue the discourse with trustworthiness, with a sense that it is right that Neoptolemus should steal the bow. The sailors sing that ‘as far

⁵⁷ ‘I termini chiave come «partire», «arco» non sono mai pronunciati’ (p. 255).

⁵⁸ Cf. Schmidt, 1973, ‘Alles, was der Chor äußert, bleibt wohl verschlüsselt. [...] Die Äußerungen bleiben so vortrefflich getarnt, daß sie für Ph[iloktetes], wenn er sie hören könnte, nicht einmal verräterisch wären’ (pp. 151-2).

as my mind can grasp the matter, the labour that does not cause fear is best' (τὸ δ' ἀλώσιμον ἐμᾶ φροντίδι / πόνος ὁ μὴ φοβῶν κράτιστος, 863-4). The proviso indicates that their insight is limited: they sing as an intra-diegetic voice whose advice is based on how they, as sailors involved in the Trojan War, see the situation. They are, however, not the ultimate authority of the play.

So far, I have talked about the lyric dialogue as though it were a *stasimon*. As I said at the start, however, Neoptolemus utters four hexameter lines after the strophe and when he chants that 'we have this prey of the weapons in vain if we sail without him' (θήραν / τήνδ' ἀλίως ἔχομεν τόξων, δίχα τοῦδε πλέοντες, 839-40), spectators familiar with the mythological and poetic tradition know that he is right: Philoctetes must come, too: 'his is the crown of victory' (τοῦδε γὰρ ὁ στέφανος, 841), 'it is him that god told us to bring' (τοῦτον θεὸς εἶπε κομίζειν, 841). Neoptolemus, then, assesses the situation more truthfully than the *choreutai* and the question arises whether, at a time when the choral discourse is revealed to be unreliable, the son of Achilles may be the new source of authoritativeness. Let me examine this possibility in a little more detail.

First, Neoptolemus' utterance is in hexameters and, as Pohlenz (1930) points out, he thus speaks 'in the solemn rhythms of the Delphic god of prophecy, in an almost visionary tone' (p. 348).⁵⁹ Avezzù and Pucci (2003) even wonder whether 'the possession of the divine weapon makes

⁵⁹ 'In den feierlichen Rhythmen des delphischen Sehergottes, in fast visionärem Tone' (p. 348). Similarly Kitto, 1939, p. 304; Bowra, 1944, p. 281; Whitman, 1951, p. 183; Adams, 1957, p. 150; Reinhardt, 1979, p. 181; Burton, 1980, p. 242; Ussher, 1990, p. 139; Scott, 1996, p. 186; Ringer, 1998, pp. 116-7; Avezzù and Pucci, 2003, p. 256. Budelmann, 2000, n. 42, pp. 127-8, notes that there is only one other example of such hexameter lines in the extant plays by Sophocles, namely in the final *kommos* of the *Trachiniae*, at 1010-14, 1018-22, and 1031-40. In these lines, Heracles, writhing in pain, begs those around him to kill him. Hyllus, however, says that 'such are the things Zeus dispenses' (τοιαῦτα νέμει Ζεὺς, 1022). The rare use of hexameter lines and the emphasis on the presence of a divine hand behind human actions, then, links the two plays.

Neoptolemus more sensitive to the voice of the prophecy' (p. 257).⁶⁰ If the young man's discourse is oracular, it is likely to be authoritative.

Secondly, when talking about the prophecy, the False Merchant stressed that it was a human 'seer' (μάντις, 604) who made the pronouncement. Neoptolemus, however, says that it is 'god' (θεός, 841) who has told him to bring Philoctetes. It is as though he is not simply interpreting the prophecy made by Helenus but as if god is speaking through him, without the need of an intermediary. This, too, makes his utterance sound trustworthy.

On the other hand, Neoptolemus speaks very much as a *dramatis persona*: first, his utterance begins with a pronoun ('I see', ἐγὼ ὄρω, 839). Secondly, his vision, rather than being divine, seems to be motivated by personal preoccupations. In his last hexameter line he states that 'to boast of things unaccomplished while uttering lies is a shameful disgrace' (κομπεῖν δ' ἔστ' ἀτελῇ σὺν ψεύδεσιν αἰσχρὸν ὄνειδος, 842): to achieve a mission by telling untruths is base enough, but to boast of it when it is in fact incomplete – because it excludes Philoctetes – is dishonourable. Here, the words 'lies' (ψεύδεσιν) and 'shameful' (αἰσχρόν) evoke the prologue: when Odysseus first proposed the use of 'deceit' (δόλοισιν, 91, δόλω, 101, 102, 107), the young man asked, 'do you not think it *shameful* to *tell lies*?' (οὐκ αἰσχρὸν ἡγεῖ δῆτα τὸ ψευδῇ λέγειν, 108). His mentor, however, persuaded him to accept his scheme by pointing out the benefit (κέρδος, 111), both for the community – 'salvation' (σωθῆναι, 109) – and for Neoptolemus himself: 'you would be called both clever and at the same time valiant' (σοφός τ' ἂν αὐτὸς κάγαθὸς κεκλῇ ἄμα, 119). The dialogic overtones between the prologue and the hexameter lines suggest that Neoptolemus is reviewing whether 'casting off all shame' (πᾶσαν αἰσχύνην ἀφείς, 120), as he decided to do at the start of the intrigue, was

⁶⁰ 'Una domanda va posta: il possesso dell' arma divina rende forse Neottolemo più sensibile alla voce della profezia? È possibile' (p. 257).

really the correct choice: he is not speaking as a visionary, then, but as a fallible figure trying to work out for himself what action best accords with his 'nature' (φύσει, 79; cf. 88, 89). As Gardiner (1987) points out, 'oracles may speak in hexameters but so do heroes, the great epic heroes of Homer. This is the son of Achilles speaking, at last beginning to assert himself, to speak with the authority of the Homeric sceptered king' (p. 38).⁶¹ Again, however, the interpretation is left to each individual spectator.

Let me summarise what we have learnt from the lyric dialogue. First, ultimately it is left open if the *choreutai* are performing the initial *paeon* to Sleep as part of their conspiracy against Philoctetes or if they are truly concerned for his well-being: some aspects of the discourse sound as though they are performing as a *dramatis persona*; others, for example the evocation of the Homeric hymn to Asclepius and of the contemporary *paeon*, the elevated style, and the proleptic quality of their utterances suggest that the extra-diegetic voice is intruding into the discourse.

When the *choreutai* address Neoptolemus, however, there is no doubt that they are acting as part of Odysseus' scheme. They use veiled language to hide their plan from Philoctetes, and the clusters of poetic markers reflect their sense of urgency and impatience; they do not signal the intrusion of the extra-diegetic voice. Indeed, the very wording of the sailors' final utterance before Philoctetes wakes up suggests that they may not fully grasp the situation. The deviation from the *gestalt* of the play and the mythological and poetic tradition, then, is not as disturbing as it may at first appear: it is made by the chorus as a stage figure who have always been committed to Odysseus' scheme but whose discourse does not

⁶¹ Similarly Winnington-Ingram (1980): 'I suggest that the hexameters are used as a heroic, not an oracular, metre' (n. 26, p. 287).

present the audience with an authoritative guide to the interpretation of the play.

Secondly, we again notice how the shifts in the modes and the levels of communication create a tension in the choral voice between utterances that are trustworthy and those that are not. This tension is here intensified by the disruption of the traditional tragic patterning of events: spectators with theatrical experience and expertise are likely to have expected a *stasimon* in which the chorus step back from the action and comment on its progress. This part, however, may now be taken by Neoptolemus if we believe that, in his hexameter lines, he truly interprets the will of the gods since his utterance accords with the myth and the *gestalt* created in the *parodos* and the *stasimon*. The *choreutai*, on the other hand, continue to use lyric to further the plot: the roles traditionally taken by stage figure and chorus are becoming blurred, raising questions about the true *locus* of authoritative discourse.

This has two effects. First, the uncertainty engages the audience: each spectator is forced to analyse the information released so far to try to come to a consistent reading of the action. Here, it also creates a new focus: the requirements of Helenus' prophecy. So far they have only been mentioned, or alluded to, by two figures: Odysseus (68-9, 113, 115) and the False Merchant (604-5, 610-13). For both, Philoctetes is simply a means to an end; they are not concerned with his humanity. Neoptolemus' hexameter lines, on the other hand, suggest something different: that Philoctetes deserves respect and salvation.

The second effect has to do with the use of the chorus as a dramatic tool. So far, the intentions of the sailors and their young captain have coincided: both have performed together to ensnare Philoctetes' mind. Neoptolemus, however, seems gradually to be coming under the spell of the wounded warrior. The choral discourse, then, the sailors' insistence on getting hold of the bow without any regard for the man, clashes with

Neoptolemus' growing discontent with deceit as a means of bringing Philoctetes to Troy.⁶²

5. THE KOMMOS (IN PLACE OF A THIRD *STASIMON*) (1081-1217)

The *kommos*, too, disrupts audience expectations. After a tumultuous episode, spectators with some theatrical expertise probably anticipated yet another *stasimon*, trying to make sense of the action of the third episode. Instead, they once more experience an *amoibaion*, or more precisely a *kommos*,⁶³ this time between Philoctetes and the chorus. Before I analyse this lament, it is worth looking at the comments made by the *coryphaeus* in the previous scene because they reveal a trend which will continue to the end of the play: the sailors increasingly withdraw from the action, forcing Neoptolemus to make momentous decisions without their advice. This detachment also has an effect on the audience in the theatre: it deprives them of a potentially authoritative voice to help them come to an interpretation of the events performed on stage.

After Philoctetes has recovered from his paroxysm and is eager to depart from Lemnos, Neoptolemus becomes increasingly uncomfortable with deceiving his new friend and eventually reveals that the warrior must join the Trojan expedition (916).⁶⁴ Philoctetes, realising that he has been duped, first reacts with a torrent of abuse, then pleads with Neoptolemus to 'come to yourself' (ἐν σαυτῷ γενοῦ, 950) and to return the bow since, without it, he will die. The *coryphaeus*, like his young captain, is at a loss ('what are we to do?', τί δρῶμεν; 963). In contrast to the lyric dialogue, however, he does not suggest how Neoptolemus

⁶² See Garvie, 1972, on how the three different methods of bringing Philoctetes to Troy (deceit, violence and persuasion) are tested in three stages in the course of the play.

⁶³ In chapter 12 of *Poetics*, Aristotle defines a *kommos* as 'a dirge between chorus and actors' (θρήνος κοινὸς χοροῦ καὶ ἀπὸ σκηνηγῆς, 1452b24-5). It, therefore, contains an element of lament.

⁶⁴ Neoptolemus' *aporia* is indicated throughout this episode by his repetition of the question 'what am I to do?' (895, 908, 969, 974).

should act but simply tells him that ‘it rests with you, lord, whether we sail now or comply with this man’s words’ (ἐν σοὶ καὶ τὸ πλεῖν ἡμᾶς, ἄναξ, / ἥδη ‘στὶ καὶ τοῖς τοῦδε προσχωρεῖν λόγοις, 963-4). Addressing Neoptolemus as ‘lord’ rather than ‘son’, he leaves the final decision to him, in effect abdicating his responsibility towards his young and inexperienced master.⁶⁵

The potential handover of the bow is prevented by the sudden appearance of Odysseus. With the bow in Neoptolemus’ possession, he is no longer in danger of his life and confronts his enemy, demanding that he sail to Troy. Philoctetes refuses and, realising who is behind the deceit plot, blames Odysseus for subverting Neoptolemus’ true nature and teaching him ‘to be clever in evil’ (ἐν κακοῖς εἶναι σοφόν, 1015). In his two-line response to the hero’s speech, the *coryphaeus* comments ambiguously: ‘severe is the stranger and severe the words he has spoken, Odysseus, and he does not yield to troubles’ (βαρὺς τε καὶ βαρεῖαν ὁ ξένος φάτιν / τήνδ’ εἶπ’, Ὀδυσσεῦ, κούχ’ ὑπείκουσαν κακοῖς, 1045-6). Initially, the remark is reminiscent of the *Antigone* (472-3) where the *coryphaeus* criticises the young woman for indirectly accusing Creon of being foolish.⁶⁶ The *coryphaeus*, then, seems to express disapproval of Philoctetes. Many of the warrior’s accusations, however, are true.⁶⁷ The chorus-leader, then, in effect first censures Odysseus, then Philoctetes, leaving it open to the audience how *they* ought to interpret the warrior’s speech.

⁶⁵ Of course, in the prologue, the sailors told their captain that he possesses superior ‘skills and judgements’ (τέχνας [...] / καὶ γνώμα) since he is ‘the master of the divine sceptre of Zeus’ (τὸ θεῖον / Διὸς σκῆπτρον ἀνάσσεται, 139-40). When they recommended stealing the bow, however, they implicitly suggested that their judgement was better than Neoptolemus’. Their refusal now, therefore, comes as something of a surprise.

⁶⁶ ‘It is clear: the nature of the girl is savage, like her father’s. She does not know how to bend before troubles’ (δῆλον· τὸ γέννημ’ ὦμόν ἐξ ὦμοῦ πατρὸς / τῆς παιδός. εἴκειν δ’ οὐκ ἐπίσταται κακοῖς, 472-3).

⁶⁷ Cf. Visser, 1998: ‘Dies [sind] schwere Anschuldigungen, die Philoctetes gegen Odysseus vorbringt’ (p. 144).

Throughout the confrontation between Philoctetes and Odysseus, Neoptolemus remains silent, even when his new friend tries to commit suicide (1002-3) and Odysseus tells Philoctetes that he will leave him behind on Lemnos since Teucer or another Greek warrior, including himself, can use the bow at Troy (1054-64).⁶⁸ As Steidle (1968) notes, however, Neoptolemus' discomfort can be sensed from his silences (934, 951, 1066) and his body language (935, 1011-12), on both of which Philoctetes comments repeatedly.⁶⁹ A word from the chorus-leader might have provided some guidance but when the warrior asks 'do you not pity me?' (οὐκ ἐπουκτερεῖτέ με; 1071), the *coryphaeus* simply reiterates what he said before: 'this boy is our captain; what *he* may say to you, this *we* also say to you' (ὅδ' ἐστὶν ἡμῶν ναυκράτωρ ὁ παῖς: ὅσ' ἂν / οὗτος λέγῃ σοι, ταῦτά σοι χῆμεῖς φαμέν, 1072-3). Immediately afterwards, Neoptolemus leaves with Odysseus but tells his crew that, as a sign of his 'pity' (οἴκτου, 1074), they may stay with Philoctetes until the ship is ready, so that 'perhaps in the intervening time this man may come to a better way of thinking about us' (χοῦτος τάχ' ἂν φρονήσιν ἐν τούτῳ λάβοι / λῶω τιν' ἡμῖν, 1078-9). This makes the *kommos* that follows ambiguous: it is uncertain whether the *choreutai* are simply following Neoptolemus' orders or whether there is something in their comments that can be used to come to a reliable interpretation of the action.

Let me start by giving a brief overview of the *kommos*: the exchange is entirely in lyric, and consists of two strophic pairs, followed by a long astrophic *amoibaion*. In each stanza, Philoctetes sings at length, while the *choreutai* reply more briefly. Initially, the hero does not respond to the

⁶⁸ A number of critics, including Jebb, 1898, p. 12, § 12, and Hinds, 1967, p. 177, believe that Odysseus is simply bluffing. Contra, among others, Robinson, 1969, p. 45. For a detailed discussion with extensive bibliography, see Visser, 1998, p. 151-61. In my view, Avezzù and Pucci, 2003, are right when they say that '[gli] argomenti non permettono mai conclusioni sicure' (p. 282).

⁶⁹ Contra Calder, 1971, who thinks that Neoptolemus 'has detected Odysseus' manoeuvre' (p. 161) and is, therefore, also role-playing.

sailors' utterances but apostrophises his physical surroundings (strophe A), his betrayed self (antistrophe A), his bow (strophe B), and the animals he used to hunt (antistrophe B). In each stanza he, moreover, emotionally laments his imminent death, now that treachery has deprived him of his bow. The *choreutai*, on the other hand, blame this fate on the hero himself (strophe A) and the gods (antistrophe A); they justify the action taken by Odysseus and Neoptolemus (strophe B); and they remind Philoctetes that there is an alternative to his doom (antistrophe B). It is only in the astrophic and more passionate *amoibaion* that Philoctetes finally engages with the sailors.

Throughout the entire exchange, the authoritativeness of the choral discourse is extremely low. The mode of communication is mimetic and the entire exchange is on the primary level. There is some repetition, but it is, to quote Silk (1999) again, 'relatable to [the sailors'] personalized emotion' (p. 15): it reflects their frustration and impatience with Philoctetes' intransigence ('*you, let me tell you, you, let me tell you, have decreed it so*', σύ τοι σύ τοι κατηξίωσας, 1095; 'this represents the *destiny*, the *destiny* of the gods', πότμος, πότμος σε δαιμόνων τάδ', 1116; '*know it, know it well*', γνῶθ', εὔ γνῶθ', 1165; '*dear, dear are these orders you give* [...] / *let us go, let us go*', φίλα μοι, φίλα ταῦτα παρήγγειλας [...] / ἴωμεν ἴωμεν, 1178-1179b). The *choreutai* are simply performing as a *dramatis persona*; there is no intrusion of the extra-diegetic voice. Equally importantly, the sailors lack any epistemological insight. They fail to comprehend Philoctetes' reaction: his despair at, and yet acceptance of, death, his anger, his sense of betrayal, and his confusion.⁷⁰ Instead, the crew put a sophistic spin on the Odyssean scheme, and this makes their arguments unconvincing.

⁷⁰ Despair: 1089-94, 1102, 1105-10, 1155-8, 1187-9; anger: 1113-15, 1200-2; sense of betrayal: 1083-5, 1111-1112, 1125, 1134-9, 1125-6, 1172; confusion: 1188-9, 1193-5.

Nonetheless, examined against Helenus' prophecy and the mythological and poetic tradition, many of their utterances do contain truths and a number of them are later confirmed by Heracles.⁷¹ In strophe A, for instance, Philoctetes laments his inability to provide food for himself without the invincible bow. The chorus, however, blame *him*, 'the man with a severe destiny' (βαρύποτμε, 1096) because he 'decreed' (κατηξίωσας, 1095) his 'fate' (τύχα, 1097): when he could have shown 'good sense' (φρονῆσαι, 1098), rather than choosing 'the better fortune' (λῶνος δαίμονος, 1099), he selected 'what is worse' (τὸ κάκιον, 1100). On the level of the action, this is, at best, a half-truth. Philoctetes was given no choice: as Odysseus told him, 'they will bring you by force [...] if you do not come voluntarily' (βία στελοῦσί σε [...] ἢν μὴ ἔρπης ἐκών, 993, 985). The option of staying on Lemnos, however, without his bow is not a real alternative since it will bring certain death.

Nonetheless, according to the mythological and poetic tradition, Philoctetes *did* go to Troy. Many spectators, then, will expect him to yield in the end, and this puts a different slant on his stubborn refusal.⁷² After all, Neoptolemus, now his friend, has shown him the benefits: Philoctetes is not only to 'ravage the plains of Troy' (τὰ Τροίας πεδία πορθῆσαι, 919), his coming will also 'save you from this trouble' (σῶσαι κακοῦ [...] τοῦδ', 919). Odysseus, too, allayed one of Philoctetes' fears: he will not be brought to Troy 'as a slave' (ὡς δούλους, 995) but 'as an equal to the most noble with whom you are fated to take Troy and raze it to the ground by force' (ὁμοίους τοῖς ἀρίστοισιν, μεθ' ὧν / Τροίαν σ' ἐλεῖν δεῖ καὶ κατασκάψαι βία, 997-8). This accords with Helenus' prophecy and the

⁷¹ Cf. Avezzi and Pucci, 2003: 'Molti studiosi condannano l'ipocrisia del Coro [...]. Ma al di là [...], il testo, intenzionalmente o meno, fa pensare alla problematica e imperfetta complicità che esiste fra il piano di Odisseo e il destino voluto dai dei' (p. 286).

⁷² Cf. Budelmann et al., 2016, on spectators' response to Ajax's 'deception speech' because they have been told about his subsequent suicide: 'constructing character is a matter of making sense of what one sees now in the light of what one knows happened in the past and will happen in the future' (p. 108).

poetic tradition and is later confirmed by Heracles who tells the warrior that he will be awarded ‘the prize of the best and bravest of the army’ (ἀριστεῖ [...] στρατεύματος, 1429).⁷³ Philoctetes, then, *could* choose a different destiny for himself.

Similarly in antistrophe A: Philoctetes condemns the ‘hidden words of a cunning mind’ (1112). The chorus, however, make the ‘destiny of the gods’ (πότμος [...] δαιμόνων, 1116) responsible.⁷⁴ They reject the notion that they used treachery (δόλος, 1117) against Philoctetes and assure him that, what most ‘concerns’ (μέλει, 1121) them, is that he should not reject their ‘friendship’ (φιλότητ’, 1122). Schein (2013) writes that ‘the chorus are disingenuous. [...] They have helped the intrigue against Philoctetes since they first came on the scene (cf. 135-6, 391-402, 507-8) and they actually proposed stealing the bow and leaving Philoctetes behind (836-8, 845-64)’. For him, therefore, the reference to ‘doom, doom from the gods’ is self-serving and hypocritical’ (p. 295). On the level of the action, this is, of course, true.

On the other hand, the chorus’s use of the word ‘concern’ (μέλει, 1121) creates dialogic overtones with a comment made by Neoptolemus earlier in the play. In the *parodos*, he stated that Philoctetes’ suffering was a sign of the ‘concern of the gods’ (θεῶν του μελέτη, 196): the warrior is not supposed to direct the ‘invincible shafts of the gods’ (τὰ θεῶν ἀμάχητα βέλη, 198) at Troy before the time has come when the city ‘is fated’ (χρηῖναι, 200) to fall. At that precise moment in the action, Neoptolemus’ statement was questionable since it simply justified the Odyssean

⁷³ Neoptolemus makes a similar prediction in the next scene, in his final and most sincere attempt at persuading Philoctetes (‘the single best man’, ἕνα / [...] ἀριστον, 1344-5).

⁷⁴ Kamerbeek, 1980, p. 154, notes that this is inconsistent with 1195-7. The two possibilities, however, complement each other, as the *choreutai* try to extricate themselves from blame. Cf. Schmidt, 1973: Die ‘Haltung [des Chors] ist auch Unbehagen vor der eigenen Rolle’ (p. 191).

scheme.⁷⁵ The reference to Helenus' prophecy, however, *did* give it, at least some, credibility.

The same is true for the 'concern' of the sailors now: they want Philoctetes to believe in their friendship so that he can come to Troy without ill-will and conquer the city as predicted by the seer. The gods, then, *are* concerned for Philoctetes' ultimate fate, and this is later confirmed when Heracles speaks about 'Zeus' plans' (τὰ Διός [...] βουλεύματα, 1415) and tells his friend that 'this suffering is destined to make your life glorious out of these labours (τοῦτ' ὀφείλεται παθεῖν, / ἐκ τῶν πόνων τῶνδ' εὐκλεᾶ θέσθαι βίον, 1422).⁷⁶ Seen from this perspective, the *choreutai* are again right in the *kommos*.⁷⁷

In strophe B, Philoctetes laments the fact that his bow is now being handled by Odysseus, the 'man of many contrivances' (πολυμηχάνου ἀνδρός, 1135), and by Neoptolemus, the 'hateful enemy' (στυγνὸν δὲ φῶτ' ἐχθοδοπὸν, 1137) who plotted 'innumerable evils' (μυρί' / [...] κάκ', 1138-9) against him arising 'from shameful deeds' (ἀπ' αἰσχρῶν [...] / ἔργων, 1138-9). The *choreutai*, however, reject this notion, arguing that Neoptolemus and Odysseus acted 'on the command of the many' (ἀπὸ πολλῶν / ταχθείς, 1143-4) and 'are rendering a public service to their friends' (κοινὰν ἥνυσεν ἐς φίλους ἀρωγάν, 1145). For Kitzinger (2008) 'the hollowness of the chorus's language is so plain, even to it, that it is forced to abandon its false position as Philoctetes' friend [...]: it retreats into aphorisms and generalities' (p. 130).

⁷⁵ There is also a verbal trigger that signals that Neoptolemus' discourse is not authoritative: he admits that 'it is said' (λέγεται, 199) that the city will fall. He does not possess any real insight; he simply knows this information by hearsay.

⁷⁶ For the ambiguous use of the preposition ἐκ (temporal or causal), see Garvie, 1972, p. 225.

⁷⁷ Even Odysseus' assertion in the scene just gone, although highly problematic in the context of his cruel treatment of the angry warrior, contains some truth: 'it is Zeus [...] who has decided this: I serve him' (Ζεύς ἐσθ', [...] / ᾧ δέδοκται ταῦθ': ὑπηρετῶ δ' ἐγώ, 989-90). Again, Sophocles' presentation of the stage figures and the ethical implications of their actions is extremely subtle.

Again, however, this is not entirely correct. As the discourse repeatedly makes clear, Odysseus *does* have the authority of the Greek army⁷⁸ and he *is* working for the salvation (τὸ σωθῆναι, 109) of the Achaeans at Troy. The fact that Neoptolemus sees himself as a ‘traitor’ (αἰσχρός, 906) when he tells Philoctetes what the true purpose of the mission is and that, after his break with Odysseus, he equates disobedience to his mentor with disobedience ‘to the entire army’ (τῷ [...] σύμπαντι στρατῷ, 1226) gives some credence to the chorus’s statement.⁷⁹

Finally, in antistrophe B, Philoctetes laments his imminent death, imagining how, without his bow, the beasts he used to hunt will turn on him and glut themselves on his flesh. The chorus, again reassuring him of their ‘goodwill’ (εὐνοία, 1164), remind him that it is in his power to escape this ‘death-doom’ (κῆρα, 1166), that ‘it is pitiable to feed it’ (οἰκτρὰ γὰρ βόσκειν, 1167) and ‘not realise that he cannot bear its infinite burden’ (ἀδαῆς δ’ / ἔχειν μυρίον ἄχθος, 1167-8). Gardiner (1987) writes that ‘Neoptolemus’ men [...] show not the slightest understanding of the injustice that has been done to Philoctetes’ (p. 43).

At the same time, however, the use of the verb ‘feed’ (βόσκειν, 1167) creates further dialogic overtones, this time with Philoctetes’ own words. At the end of his great speech, he told his visitors that ‘I have been perishing miserably now for ten years in hunger and troubles, *feeding* the insatiable sickness’ (ἀπόλλυμαι τάλας / ἔτος τόδ’ ἤδη δέκατον ἐν λιμῷ τε καὶ / κακοῖσι βόσκων τὴν ἀδηφάγον νόσον, 311-13). Earlier, he stated that ‘my sickness has always been *thriving* and *is becoming stronger*’ (ἦ δ’ ἐμὴ νόσος / ἀεὶ τέθηλε καπὶ μείζον ἔρχεται, 259-60). His ‘sickness’ (νόσος) is not just physical, arising from the pain from his wound, but also emotional, brought about by the impact of the injustice done to him: his

⁷⁸ Cf. 66-7, 906, 925-6, 1226, 1243, 1257-8, 1294, 1404.

⁷⁹ Odysseus, of course, also admits that ‘it is in my nature to desire victory’ (νικᾶν [...] πανταχοῦ χορῆζων ἔφυν, 1052), and he is prepared to use any means to achieve it. As Gellie, 1972, says: ‘the picture we get of Odysseus [...] is a complicated one’ (p. 132).

anger at the ‘unholy way’ (ἀνοσίως, 257) in which he was abandoned, his conviction that his enemies are mocking him (γελῶσι, 258; ἐγγελαῖ, 1125), and his frustration that, for ten years, he has been forced to exist like ‘a corpse or the shadow of smoke, a mere phantom’ (νεκρὸν ἢ καπνοῦ σκιάν, / εἶδωλον ἄλλως, 946-7; cf. 1018). His repeated curses in the *kommos* and elsewhere⁸⁰ show his obsession with Odysseus, the Atridae, and the whole Greek army. To a certain extent, then, the *choreutai* are right when they sing that he must stop ‘feeding’ his death-doom. The discourse, returns to a theme already hinted at in the *parodos* and the *stasimon*: that Philoctetes’ lack of moderation increases his misery and prevents his salvation.⁸¹

In the astrophic *amoibaion* the choral contributions are less substantial: the sailors state again that Philoctetes should come to Troy (1176, 1196), they get ready to leave when he refuses (1179b) and, when he supplicates them to come back, they exhort him to ‘be moderate (μετρίαζ’, 1183). Their insight is also limited: when Philoctetes asks for a sword (1206), they do not understand why he may be wanting to commit suicide (1210). Their discourse is bereft of authoritativeness: it provides no guidance for an interpretation of the action.

This shines the spotlight on Philoctetes’ dilemma. Although his hatred of the Greek army still induces him vehemently to refuse to go to Troy (1174-5, 1196-9), he is torn: the discourse emphasises his desperate desire for human contact (1182-5, 1190), his irrational behaviour caused by his pent-up anger (1194-5), his despair (1186-9), his suicidal thoughts (1207-8), and his delusional hope of finding his father in Hades (1210-12). As Gottlieb (2004) writes, ‘the supreme expression of his vengeful hatred is through self-injury and suffering’ (p. 675). Although Philoctetes’ reaction

⁸⁰ *Kommos*: 1113-15, 1200-1202; elsewhere: 275, 314-16, 791-5, 1019, 1043-4, 1285-6, 1369.

⁸¹ Cf. Allan, 2014: ‘When Philoctetes refuses to go to Troy, [...] we see how his hatred of the Achaeans feeds the sickness itself, as if his suppurating foot were an embodiment of his festering resentment’ (p. 271).

to the conspiracy is understandable and his steadfastness commendable, he also denies *himself* a better future by ignoring Helenus' prophecy and rejecting the heroic destiny it promises him.⁸²

Let me summarise what we have learnt from the *kommos*. First, the authoritativeness of the discourse is even more ambiguous than in the rest of the play. On the one hand, the repeated references to fate act as a reminder of Helenus' prophecy and the mythological and poetic tradition. Uncomfortable though it may feel at this stage of the action, then, the sailors' utterances do possess some veracity: when they point to the care of the gods for Philoctetes' destiny, when they accuse the warrior of a lack of sense, and exhort him to be moderate, they are ultimately right. The fact that Heracles later confirms many of the details retrospectively validates their arguments and lends the discourse a proleptic quality.

At the same time, however, the choice of a *kommos* instead of a *stasimon* underlines the fact that the *choreutai* never stop functioning as a *dramatis persona*. In contrast to the central stanzas of the *parodos* and to the *stasimon*, the mode of communication remains mimetic throughout, and the sailors never show any special epistemological insight: the meta-diegetic voice does not intrude into their discourse. Indeed, their argumentation distorts the events, especially Neoptolemus' betrayal of Philoctetes' trust and Odysseus' cruelty towards the hero.

In addition, unlike in the last stanza of the *stasimon* and the *paeon* to Hypnos, there are few poetic markers and the ones that are present simply reflect the sailors' impatience. The discourse, then, also lacks the guiding hand of the extra-diegetic voice. Overall, there is little in the exchange to suggest that a spectator can use the sailors' utterances in order reliably to

⁸² Cf. Reinhardt, 1979, p. 186. Garvie, 1972, notes the 'double tension' in the audience's response to Philoctetes: 'We do not want him to be left in this situation, but neither do we want him to betray his own integrity by yielding to Odysseus' (p. 220).

evaluate the action: the discourse is never truly authoritative, and this makes the interpretation of the *kommos* uncertain.

This ambiguity, however, has a dramatic function: it prepares for the two ‘endings’ of the play. On the one hand, the feebleness of the arguments of the *choreutai* makes Philoctetes’ determination not to go to Troy more comprehensible: his insistence on being taken back to Malis by Neoptolemus is, then, consistent with his moral integrity, his heroic obstinacy, and his strength of character, all of which he displays in the *kommos*. On the other hand, the *amoibaion* places a greater emphasis on the mental aspect of Philoctetes’ illness and signals that his determination is weakening.⁸³ This prepares for his eventual submission to the one friend who has never betrayed him and to whom he owes the possession of the invincible bow: Heracles.

6. THE EXODUS AND THE FINAL CHORAL COMMENT (1218-1471)

The *kommos* ends with the entry of Neoptolemus and Odysseus, quarrelling over the bow. From now to the end of the play the chorus are entirely silent.⁸⁴ The *coryphaeus* says nothing during the *stichomythia* between the two men, even when they nearly come to blows and Odysseus withdraws, threatening his pupil that ‘when I go and tell the whole army what has happened it is they who will punish you’ (τῷ δὲ σύμπαντι στρατῷ λέξω τάδ’ ἐλθὼν, ὅς σε τιμωρήσεται, 1257-8). He also fails to respond when Neoptolemus returns the bow to Philoctetes. The weapons which the sailors were prepared to steal in the sleep scene suddenly do not seem to matter anymore.

Equally importantly, the chorus-leader does not respond to the major speeches made by the two protagonists, not even with a traditional

⁸³ Contra, Linforth, 1956: ‘It may be positively asserted that Philoctetes’ determined resistance is maintained unbroken to the end’ (pp. 151-2).

⁸⁴ There is a similar choral silence at the end of the *Trachiniae* (from 1114) and the *Electra* (from 1442).

two-line utterance. He does not comment on Neoptolemus' long oration in which he accuses his friend that 'you have grown wild' (σὺ δ' ἡγρώσαι, 1320; cf. 226) and tries to persuade him 'voluntarily' (ἐκῶν, 1332) to come to Troy, adding the vital new incentive that his friend will be cured there of his 'severe sickness' (νόσου βαρείας, 1330). Whereas at the start of their mission the sailors tried to help their captain, (maybe) even lying to further the mission (lyric interludes, 391-402 and 507-18), the chorus-leader now offers no assistance.

The *coryphaeus* also remains silent after Philoctetes' speech in which, though torn, he continues to refuse to go to Troy, unable to face being in the company of the Atridae and Odysseus from whom he fears further pain, 'for when men's mind has once become the mother of evil deeds, it begets yet more evil' (οἷς γὰρ ἡ γνώμη κακῶν / μήτηρ γένηται, τᾶλλα παιδεύει κακούς, 1360-1). This refusal not only deprives Neoptolemus of guidance, it also casts a shadow over the eventual 'happy' ending of the play since not even Heracles provides Philoctetes with reassurance in this matter.⁸⁵

Further, the chorus-leader provides no comment when Philoctetes persuades Neoptolemus to take him home to Malis instead of going to Troy. He does not even respond when the warrior turns Neoptolemus' own words against him, asking him why he is prepared to fight with the men 'who insulted you, depriving you of your father's gift of honour' (οἳ γέ σου καθύβρισαν, πατρὸς γέρας συλῶντες, 1364-5),⁸⁶ when he accuses him of 'shaming the gods' (καταισχύνει θεούς, 1382), of 'wanting to hand me over to my enemies' (τοῖς ἐχθροῖσί μ' ἐκδοῦναι θέλεις, 1386), of 'ruining me [...] with these words' (ὀλεῖς με [...] τοῖσδε τοῖς λόγοις, 1388).

⁸⁵ Cf. Roberts, 1988, on the effect, in Sophocles, of allusions to stories beyond the ending of the actual tragedy. See also, Hester, 1973, and, more generally, Fowler, 1989.

⁸⁶ Blundell, 1988, comments that Neoptolemus fails to clear up this misunderstanding and that his lies continue to cast 'a shadow over the burgeoning friendship with Philoctetes' (p. 146).

The injured warrior is beginning to use rhetoric not unlike that employed by Odysseus in the prologue when *he* tried to persuade his pupil to act in a way which, in his heart, the young man knew to be wrong. Even at another moment of *aporia*, when Neoptolemus asks ‘what are we to do if nothing I can say will persuade you?’ (τί δῆτ’ ἂν ἡμεῖς δοῶμεν, εἰ σέ γ’ ἐν λόγοις / πείσειν δυνησόμεσθα μηδὲν ὧν λέγω; 1393-4), the *coryphaeus* remains silent, forcing the young man to make the momentous decision by himself and failing to provide any potential help to the audience on how to interpret the action.

Finally, the chorus-leader does not comment when Neoptolemus expresses the fear that the Greeks may ravage his country (1405) and when Philoctetes assures him that he will protect him with ‘the arrows of Heracles’ (βέλεσι τοῖς Ἡρακλέους, 1407). He is in effect suggesting to abuse the divine weapon since, as Visser (1998) points out, ‘he would have to use [it] against the Greeks when it is intended for the conquest of Troy’ (p. 239).⁸⁷ The choral silence leaves it open to each spectator to approve or disapprove of the surprising turn of the action.

In the end, it takes Heracles to fulfil the expectation of the mythological and poetic tradition and the *gestalt* suggested by the *parodos* and the *stasimon*: he simply tells Philoctetes to go to Troy and prophesies what will happen to him there. Philoctetes immediately accepts the god’s orders (‘I will not disobey your words’, οὐκ ἀπιθήσω τοῖς σοῖς μύθοις, 1147):⁸⁸ he suddenly no longer raises any of the objections that he earlier made to Neoptolemus. The play seems to finish on a happy note.

As many critics have pointed out, however, the conclusion is more ambiguous: Heracles’ speech ends with an important warning to both men: ‘remember when you ravage the land [of Troy] to show reverence in

⁸⁷ ‘Philoktet mußte den Bogen des Herakles, der für die Eroberung Troias vorgesehen ist, gegen die Griechen einsetzen’ (p. 239).

⁸⁸ Cf. Podlecki, 1966, on the difference between *logos* and *muthos* in the play.

matters regarding the gods; for Zeus my father holds all other things secondary' (τοῦτο δ' ἐννοεῖθ', ὅταν / πορθῇτε γαῖαν, εὐσεβεῖν τὰ πρὸς θεούς: / ὡς τᾶλλα πάντα δεύτερ' ἡγεῖται πατὴρ / Ζεύς, 1440-3). Spectators familiar with the epic tradition know that Neoptolemus will not heed this advice: he will drag Priam from the altar of Zeus during the conquest of the city and impiously slay him.⁸⁹ Some epic traditions even have him sacrifice the Trojan princess Polyxena over the grave of Achilles⁹⁰ and throw Astyanax, the baby son of Hector and Andromache, from the Trojan battlement.⁹¹ As we saw, Philoctetes earlier expressed the view that men, once they have been corrupted, will continue to go wrong (1360-1). Heracles' warning, therefore, casts another cloud over the final interpretation of the play. As Winnington-Ingram (1980) says 'towards the end of the play, [Sophocles] opens a window upon a tragic future. [...] [He] has introduced these impressive lines as a hint of what is waiting for Neoptolemus at Troy, of the world in which heroes live and the temptations to which they are liable. [...] The pity and scruple of Neoptolemus will disappear in the heat of battle and sack' (p. 302-3). In the play, we have already seen how both Odysseus and Philoctetes have led Neoptolemus astray, each persuading him to abandon an important aspect of his *phusis*: Odysseus his moral principles, Philoctetes his desire for heroic *kleos*. The sailors also played a part in his temptation when they urged their young and inexperienced captain to break his promise to Philoctetes and steal his bow. Moreover, towards the end of the play, they did not intervene to stop him acting contrary to his divinely willed destiny.

⁸⁹ Cf. Proclus's argument of the *Sack of Ilion*, *Chrestomathy*, 257-8 (= West, 2003, pp. 144-5).

⁹⁰ Cf. Proclus's argument of the *Sack of Ilion*, *Chrestomathy*, 273-4 (= West, 2003, pp. 146-7).

⁹¹ Cf. Tzetzes' commentary on Lycophron, 1273-6 (= West, 2003, pp. 140-1). Other Greeks will also behave impiously: Ajax Oileus, for instance, will violently drag Cassandra away from the statue of Athena to which she is clinging for protection. Cf. Proclus's argument of the *Sack of Ilion*, *Chrestomathy*, 261-2 (= West, 2003, pp. 146-7).

The final choral comment is similarly ambiguous. After Philoctetes' emotional farewell to Lemnos, the play concludes with the following words, chanted by the *choreutai*: 'let us depart altogether after praying to the sea nymphs as safe guarders of our journey' (χωρῶμεν δὴ πάντες ἀολλεῖς, / νύμφαις ἀλῖαισιν ἐπευξάμενοι / νόστου σωτήρας ἰκέσθαι, 1469-71). On the one hand, σωτήρ ('safe guarder, saviour, deliverer') evokes Neoptolemus' first attempt at persuading Philoctetes to come to Troy: he presented himself as the warrior's deliverer, urging him to come to Troy 'to *save* you from this trouble' (σῶσαι κακοῦ [...] τοῦδ', 919). νόστος ('journey, homecoming'), too, is a reminder of one of the young man's utterances: when he found the cave empty, he conjectured that Philoctetes was out on a 'journey for food' ('πὶ φορβῆς νόστον, 43.) Now, his journey (*nostos*) to Troy will finally ensure his salvation (*sōtēria*): as Heracles told him, he will be cured by Asclepius (1437) and 'make his life glorious' (εὐκλεᾶ θέσθαι βίον, 1422) by killing Paris and conquering Troy with Neoptolemus. As Schein (2001) writes, he will 'return home to his heroic self' (p. 52).

On the other hand, *sōtēr* and *nostos* have less optimistic connotations. As we saw, Odysseus also justified his deceit scheme by saying that it brought 'salvation' (τὸ σωθῆναι, 109) to the Greek army. Although, in the end, he plays no role in persuading Philoctetes to make the journey to Troy, one could say, with Ringer (1998), that 'Philoctetes and Neoptolemus remain pitifully incapable of breaking free of Odysseus' divinely sanctioned "play"' (p. 118): he set up the intrigue with the aim of securing Philoctetes and his bow, and this is precisely what is happening now.

Nostos, too, points to the future in a more sinister way: after the conquest of Troy and the impious behaviour of the Greeks, which the discourse, as we saw, evokes in Heracles' warning, the homecoming of the main heroes will be problematic: Neoptolemus will be killed at Delphi,

Odysseus' *nostos* will take ten years and he will find his house taken over by the suitors pressing Penelope to marry one of them; finally, Agamemnon, on his return to Argos, will be murdered by his wife Clytemnestra, together with his Trojan concubine, the princess Cassandra. As in the rest of the play, each individual spectator will have to decide for themselves whether the ending of the play is truly 'happy' or if it leaves some serious questions unanswered.

CONCLUSION

Throughout most of the play, the chorus perform as a *dramatis persona*, as the crew of Neoptolemus' ship who take an active part in the conspiracy to bring Philoctetes to Troy. This is reflected in the high number of *amoibaia* which replace traditional solo odes. Moreover, since the Odyssean scheme encourages lying to further the intrigue, it is often impossible to say exactly where the chorus are telling the truth and where they are dealing in falsehoods. This makes it difficult to decide whether their comments and evaluations can be used as a reliable guide for an interpretation of the action. Finally, since the *choreutai* tend to perform as an intra-diegetic voice, the level of their style is generally low: there are only few poetic markers, and where they occur, they are prompted by the context and draw attention to the crew's emotional state. Overall, then, the authoritativeness of the chorus's discourse is low.

Secondly, choral contributions change in the course of the play. At the beginning, the sailors fully assist their young captain in the Odyssean plan. Two of the *coryphaeus*'s traditional post-*rhēsis* comments are expanded into full lyric stanzas, giving the chorus a greater part in the action than in other plays. They may even be subverting prayer to support Neoptolemus' claim of humiliation at Troy and making a pious-sounding response to Philoctetes' supplication to be allowed on board their ship. Immediately after the *paeon* to Hypnos, the sailors, moreover, try actively

to shape the plot by suggesting that Neoptolemus should make off with the invincible bow while Philoctetes is helpless.

The chorus's involvement in the action decreases, however, as Neoptolemus comes under Philoctetes' spell, especially after the warrior's narration of his heroic endurance, his lament for his comrades fallen at Troy, and his trust in the young man as the son of Achilles. Indeed, at two crucial moments, the *coryphaeus* fails to provide any assistance at all: when Neoptolemus considers revealing the real purpose of their presence on Lemnos and when he wonders whether to return the bow to his new friend, the chorus-leader only assures him of the crew's support. The responsibility for the difficult decision, however, is left to the young man. The non-committal attitude also continues when Odysseus appears on stage to prevent the handover of the bow. After the Sleep scene, then, it is difficult to gauge where exactly the chorus stand with regard to the conspiracy.

This gradual detachment from the action is also conspicuous in the *kommos* where Sophocles could have given the sailors an important role in persuading Philoctetes to come to Troy. In their reasoning, however, there is nothing new: they simply repeat what Neoptolemus and Odysseus have already said, and they lay all the blame on Philoctetes, failing to acknowledge how seriously his trust has been broken by their young captain and how badly he has suffered at the hands of Odysseus. Their arguments are so feeble that it is uncertain whether the discourse should be read at face value.

In the exodus, finally, the chorus remain silent altogether when Neoptolemus actually clashes with his mentor and returns the bow to Philoctetes. They even fail to respond when, after Odysseus' final exit, the warrior persuades the young man to forego his part in the Trojan war, and Neoptolemus agrees to take him home to Malis. It is, therefore, impossible to tell if they approve of their captain's decision or if they see his

abandonment of the Odyssean mission as a betrayal. Even after Heracles' intervention, they do not comment on the action but simply pray for a safe homecoming. Altogether, then, the utterances of the chorus *qua* stage figure do not provide any reliable guide to an interpretation of the play.

There are moments, however, when the choral discourse sounds more authoritative, especially in the central stanzas of the *parodos* and the *stasimon*. Here, the discourse moves from *mimesis* (from 'showing' the action) to *diegesis* (to 'telling'), and the narration displays some of the devices employed by the Homeric storyteller: the *choreutai* suddenly home in on Philoctetes' life on the island and his state of mind, and the detail transcends what they can know as men who have only just arrived on the island. This signals the intrusion of the meta-diegetic voice.

The language, too, is stylistically more elevated in these stanzas and the poetic markers are no longer simply prompted by the particular context of the action. Instead, the discourse draws attention to the themes of the play. In the *parodos*, there is an emphasis on Philoctetes' suffering on Lemnos. His loneliness and isolation, in particular, arouse pity, and the *choreutai* show some admiration for his power of endurance. At the same time, however, there is also a first hint at the hero's lacks of moderation.

The *stasimon*, too, highlights the misery of Philoctetes' existence on the island, but the discourse suggests that there are two aspects to his suffering: not only his physical deprivations and the pain resulting from his wound, but also mental illness caused by his ever-increasing obsession with Odysseus and the Atridae. This suggests another theme of the play: the need for salvation. In the description in these stanzas, the epistemological insight displayed by the chorus again transcends that of the crew as a stage figure and signals the intrusion of the extra-diegetic voice.

Finally, the extra-diegetic voice uses the choral discourse subtly to foreshadow future events and thus to suggest the overall *gestalt* of the

play. Moreover, it directs the audience's reaction towards the hero. The *parodos* emphasises the pity of the *choreutai* and draws attention to Philoctetes' noble descent: this raises questions about his initial exposure on Lemnos and about Odysseus' plan, ten years later, to trick him into coming to Troy. It thus prepares for Neoptolemus' own sympathy for the warrior later in the play, a feeling likely to be shared by the spectators.

The *stasimon* further increases our compassion for Philoctetes but also suggests that the hero needs to be saved from himself: his suffering is partly self-inflicted since, in his hatred, he has built up a picture of the world that no longer entirely accords with reality. Troy is, therefore, made into a more desirable destination: Philoctetes' presence there will not only benefit Odysseus and the Greeks army but also the hero himself.

The *kommos*, finally, predicts the two 'endings' of the play. The weakness of the choral arguments makes Philoctetes' moral integrity and heroic obstinacy more admirable. His departure to Malis with Neoptolemus, then, is the logical consequence of the misconception and ultimate failure of Odysseus' plan. At the same time, however, there is an underlying truth in the chorus's reasoning, and Philoctetes himself signals his desire for release from his misery. A return to the land of his father, however, offers no real solution, either for his physical or his mental ills, and it, moreover, deprives both him and his new friend of their heroic destinies. This prepares for the hero's ultimate yielding to Heracles.

Overall, then, there is a tension in the choral voice: in their role as a stage figure their utterances are not trustworthy; when they perform *qua* chorus, however, their discourse carries the authoritativeness of the meta- or extra-diegetic voice. This tension is typified by the final choral comment: as an intra-diegetic voice, the *choreutai* conclude the play on an optimistic note: they pray for a safe journey to Troy and, by implication, the successful conquest of Troy as prophesied by Helenus. This will finally enable them to prepare for their real *nostos*, their return home. At the same

time, however, the extra-diegetic voice makes the ending more ambiguous: first, it draws attention to the difficulty of Philoctetes' future relationship with Odysseus and the Atridae. Heracles simply passes over this issue. Secondly, the god's last words evoke the mythological and poetic tradition beyond the play according to which Neoptolemus did not act piously during the sack of Troy. His *nostos* – and that of the Greek commanders, more generally – will be anything but happy.

Finally, the intrusion of the meta- or extra-diegetic voice is suggested in two ways in the *Philoctetes*. First, it occurs where the discourse turns from *mimesis* to *diegesis* and the language is stylistically elevated without being prompted by the immediate context. Secondly, at times, the surface intention of the discourse is undermined by what spectators have witnessed in the course of the action or by what they may know from sources outside the dramatic world of the play. Here, the choral discourse, in effect, becomes double-voiced, simultaneously carrying two meanings.

Overall, the ambiguity of the choral discourse significantly contributes to the lack of agreement on the interpretation of the play. This multivalence is a general feature of Sophoclean tragedy and, in the next chapter we shall see how, in the *Antigone*, the poet achieves it in a different way.

CHAPTER 3: CHORAL VOICES IN THE ANTIGONE

INTRODUCTION

In chapter 2 we saw that in some stanzas of the choral odes of the *Philoctetes* the language is suddenly more elevated. It is here that the *choreutai* display an insight into the hero's life on Lesbos that exceeds what they can know as sailors who have only just landed on the island. In these passages, what I call the *extra-diegetic voice* intrudes into the discourse. As I explained in chapter 1, this means that we no longer hear the voice of the chorus as a stage figure but that of the 'creative sensibility' behind the play who has decided the overarching shape of the plot, has chosen the characters to present it, created the language they employ, and selected and shaped the sequence of events that make up the action.¹ Such utterances take place on a higher level of communication and are more authoritative.

In the *Antigone* the language of *all* the odes is highly poetic, and the Elders' discourse, therefore, sounds authoritative throughout.² As we shall see, however, the context regularly makes it clear that the chorus can be as misguided in their interpretation of the action as any stage figure. There is, therefore, not the same correlation between stylistic intensification and epistemological insight as in the *Philoctetes*.

Nonetheless, in the *Antigone*, too, the extra-diegetic voice regularly intrudes into the discourse. Most choral odes contain sections that subtly foreshadow the action to come. As characters in the play, the Elders cannot know about future events; instead, in such passages the hand of the extra-diegetic voice reveals its presence, making the discourse more trustworthy.³ At other times, however, the extra-diegetic voice intrudes

¹ Adapted from Abbott, 2002, p. 95.

² See Most, 1993, for a discussion of what makes a text (oral or written) 'poetic'.

³ Cf. Cullyer, 2005: 'The chorus often speak or sing more truthfully than they, as Theban elders, are aware' (p. 19).

into the choral discourse with the opposite effect: to undermine the credibility of the surface meaning and thus raise questions about the reliability of the group's utterances.

Something else impacts on the potential authoritativeness of the choral discourse, and this also makes the *Antigone* different from the *Philoctetes*. In both plays, two main characters confront each other; Neoptolemus and Philoctetes in the one, Creon and Antigone in the other. In the *Philoctetes*, the chorus's sympathies are always clear: even when Neoptolemus' crew do not agree with their young leader, their allegiance remains firmly with him. In the *Antigone*, on the other hand, the alignment of the chorus is ambiguous. Some critics believe that they concur with Creon until the appearance of Tiresias.⁴ Others maintain that the chorus disagree with Creon from the beginning and actually approve of Antigone's action but dare not openly oppose the king.⁵ Finally, a number of critics detect what they describe as irony: Müller (1967), for instance, writes that 'the condemnatory ethical-religious judgements which, subjectively, are targeted at Antigone are, objectively [...], targeted at Creon. [...] The chorus thus indirectly, ironically, becomes the interpreter of the truth about Antigone' (p. 230).⁶

My approach to the chorus will be somewhat different. First, so far scholars have supposed that the *choreutai* comment univocally on the

⁴ Kamerbeek, 1978, sees them as 'wise, moderate and loyal elders' (p. 15) who are overwhelmed by events and take a long time 'to make up their minds against Creon' (p. 24). Winnington-Ingram, 1980, believes that 'the Chorus [...] only wait for the moral support of Teiresias to voice misgivings that they long felt (and of which indeed there have been pale hints)'. Coleman, 1972, detects choral misgivings even earlier: 'the first hint of any change in the Chorus's attitude comes in the [Haemon] scene, where Creon's ἄτη is exposed in the confrontation with his son' (p. 14).

⁵ So Schwinge, 1972, who writes: 'der Chor soll [...] als eine Gestalt betrachtet werden, die Kreons Gebot mißbilligt und Antigones Tat dann eigentlich bejaht, eben dies jedoch offen auszusprechen aus Furcht vor dem König nicht wagt' (p. 297). See Gardiner, 1987, p. 83 ns. 3 and 4, for a useful biography of the different views about the chorus.

⁶ 'Die subjektiv auf Antigone zielenden ethisch-religiösen Verdammungsurteile des Chors [zielen] objektiv [...] auf Kreon. [...] So wird der Chor indirekt, ironisch zum Deuter der Wahrheit über Antigone' (p. 230).

action. In my view, however, their discourse contains two different voices which, within each ode, illuminate the action from separate angles. One voice examine the events from Creon's position.⁷ I shall initially call them 'civic' since they foreground the importance of the *polis*. The other analyse the action from Antigone's point of view. I shall first call them 'hieratic' since their concern is with the relations between mortals and immortals.⁸

Secondly, usually scholars assume that, when the attitude of a chorus to the protagonist shifts in the course of a play, this change occurs univocally, in the group as a whole. I believe, however, that the choral attitude to Creon develops differently in the *Antigone*. The view of the hieratic voice remains static: they raise questions about purely human governance from the beginning. The stance of the civic voice, however, alters as the king's behaviour becomes more and more tyrannical until, in the end, both voices concur in their total condemnation of the king. By then, however, the authoritativeness of the chorus has become so compromised that spectators have to decide for themselves whether the king alone is to blame for the calamity, or if Antigone, and maybe even the Elders themselves, carry at least some responsibility.

I shall now examine each choral ode and the *kommoi* in turn, in the order in which the audience experience them as the play unfolds. As for the *Philoctetes*, I shall always give the context and a brief overview of the songs first, then analyse the choral discourse in detail: this will reveal how the two voices begin to emerge, how they evaluate the action differently, and

⁷ As with 'chorus', I shall treat 'voice' as a collective noun and use plural pronouns and verb forms to indicate that they are not a single entity.

⁸ By talking about a civic and a hieratic voice, I am not saying, as Hegel does, that the play as a whole presents the ethical choice as a being between the laws of the *polis* and the laws of the gods. As we shall see, Creon, too, claims piety for himself and Antigone assumes that she has the tacit support of the Elders, the civic representatives of the city. See Oudemans and Lardinois, 1987, chapter 5 (especially pp. 110-17), for a summary of Hegel's view of the play.

how the attitude of the civic voice gradually changes in the course of the tragedy. I shall also show how the extra-diegetic voice constantly raises questions about the surface meaning of the utterances and thus warns against viewing the action in too simplistic a manner. For the *parodos*, I shall, moreover, examine in some detail how the intrusion of the meta-diegetic and extra-diegetic voice affects our view of the authoritativeness of the choral discourse.

1. *PARODOS* (100-154)

The *parodos* is a long victory ode. It consists of two strophic pairs presumably sung by the whole chorus, alternating with seven-line anapaestic systems, probably chanted by the *coryphaeus* alone.⁹ In the entry song, the Theban Elders give thanks to the gods for the retreat of the Argive army led by Polynices, the brother of their king Eteocles. The *choreutai* first describe the approach of the enemy force and the battle around the city (106-26), then poignantly depict the deaths of the two brothers at each other's hands (141-7). At the centre of the ode (127-33), they attribute the Theban triumph to the aid of Zeus (127-33) and the intervention of Ares (140-1) and, at the end, sing of the arrival at Thebes of Nike, the goddess of victory (148), and of their plan to visit all the temples of the city with Dionysus, the patron god of Thebes, leading their choral dancing (151-4). From the beginning, the *parodos* combines two aspects of the conflict: the terrible danger to the city from the Argive invaders and the role of the gods in her salvation.

These two *foci* are reflected in the language. First, the *parodos* is structured like a traditional Greek triadic hymn, with its typical three sections: invocation, reminder of past support, and request.¹⁰ The *choreutai*

⁹ So Burton, 1980, p. 90. Contra: Rachel Kitzinger, 2008, pp. 13-4, who believes that the whole group perform the lyric stanzas and the anapaestic systems together.

¹⁰ See Furley and Bremer, 2001, vol. 1, pp. 50-64, for the typical features of hymns.

begin by greeting the morning 'beam of the sun' (ἀκτὶς ἀελίου, 100). As many critics have noted, an actual hymn, Pindar's *Paeon* 9 S-M, begins with the very same words.¹¹ After that, they sing that the light of this day is 'the best of any other before' (τὸ κάλλιστον [...] τῶν προτέρων, 100-2), thus indirectly referring to the sun god's previous epiphanies. Finally, they ask Bacchus to appear and lead them (ἄρχοι, 154) in their 'all-night choral dancing' (χοροῖς / παννυχίοις, 151-2), as they honour the gods of their native city. For Griffith (1999), the song has 'a flavour of authentic cult' (p. 140).

Secondly, the actual wording of the beginning of the ode is reminiscent of ritual hymns. There is an accumulation of words denoting brightness: in each of three consecutive lines there is a *polyptoton* from the 'light'-root (φάνέν, 'it shone', 101; φάος, 'light', 102; and ἐφάνθης, 'you shone forth', 103). Moreover, in the fourth line, the sun is called the 'golden eye of the day' (χρυσέας / ἀμέρας βλέφαρον, 103-4). Such lexis evokes the *paeon*, a hymn which we already encountered in the *Philoctetes* and which was sung there to ward off evil or celebrate public victories.¹² There is a sense, then, that the choral group contain a hieratic voice, a voice for whom pious behaviour is the best chance to achieve peace in Thebes. In the prologue, Antigone claimed that burying Polynices was a 'holy' act (ὅσια, 74), and this voice will later illuminate the action from her point of view.

At the same time, in the depiction of the fighting, there are clusters of words with an athletic colouring. There is, for instance, language from combat in the gymnasium: the *choreutai* sing that the noise of the fighting makes it 'a hard battle for the wrestler against the dragon' (ἀντιπάλω / δυσχείρωμα δράκοντος', 125-6). There are also images from horse-riding

¹¹ Cf. Burton, 1980, p. 91; Davidson, 1983, p. 42; Griffith, 1999, p. 143; Swift, 2010, p. 29.

¹² See Swift, 2010, pp. 62-74, on the performance function and stylistic features of the *paeon*.

and chariot-racing: the Argive forces are put to flight ‘with a sharply-piercing *bridle*’ (ὀξυτέρῳ / κινήσασα χαλινῷ, 108-9), Ares is like the ‘*right-hand horse*’ (δεξιόσειρος, 140), that is, the horse that sets the pace in a chariot-team, and Thebes is ‘*many-charioted*’ (πολυαρμάτω, 149). Other phrases evoke torch-races and javelin-throwing: one unnamed Argive soldier, on whom the description of the battle focuses and who bears a striking resemblance to Capaneus in Aeschylus’ *Septem*, carries a *torch* (πυρφόρος, ‘*fire-bearing*’ 135) and Zeus ‘throws him down with *hurled fire*’ (παλτῷ ῥίπτει πυρί, 131) just as he reaches the ‘*finishing line* at the top [of the wall]’ (βαλβίδων / ἐπ’ ἄκρων, 131-2). Finally, there is the vaunting language of the winner of a contest: ‘Capaneus’ ‘*shouts forth his victory*’ (νίκην [...] ἀλαλάξαι, 133) as he climbs the battlements.¹³ The language links athletics and military success. Both are associated with certain traditional male character qualities (ambition, willingness to take risks, etc.) and, as Swift (2010) notes, ‘when a poet uses language derived from sport, he can also evoke this masculine world-view as a whole’ (p. 118). This voice in the chorus will later align themselves with Creon, the stage figure who displays such masculine values.

The athletic language also evokes, or creates vertical dialogic overtones with, the fifth-century performance context. In Athens, sporting, military, and political success were felt to be connected: the Thucydidean Alcibiades, for instance, asserts that his multiple victories in the Olympic games of 416 BCE will make him a worthy commander of the Sicilian Expedition because they not only brought *him* ‘glory’ (δόξαν, 6.16.1) and ‘honour’ (τιμή, 6.16.2) but also resulted in ‘advantage’ (ὠφελίαν, 6.16.1) for his ‘native country’ (τῇ [...] πατρίδι, 6.16.1): his sporting triumphs helped to create the sense that, even this late in the Peloponnesian War,

¹³ There is similar athletic language in the *parodos* of Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*, in the description of the war at Troy (e.g. 64-5, 344). Cf. Swift, 2010, p. 119.

Athens still possessed 'power' (δύναμιν, 6.16.1; δύναμις, 6.16.2).¹⁴ The athletic language in the *Antigone*, then, subtly signals the chorus's hope that, after bringing victory to Thebes as a military commander (8), in his new role as their king, Creon will also prove beneficial to the entire community.¹⁵ The civic voice will later show their acceptance of the ruler by supporting, or at least not rejecting, his edict to prohibit the burial of Polynices.

The language used in the *parodos*, then, subtly prepares for the possibility that the coming conflict between Antigone and Creon will also affect the chorus's evaluation of the action and lead to a response that is double- rather than single-voiced. At the moment, however, the two voices are fused: since the Elders have no awareness of the conflict to come, they respond in harmony to the salvation of Thebes.

Let me now turn to the potential authoritativeness of the chorus by looking at the mode and level of communication. Usually, because a chorus has to be established as a *dramatis persona*, entry songs contain a fairly large number of first person verbs and pronouns. As I explained in chapter 1, this is an indication of the intra-diegetic voice, performing on the primary plane. It, therefore, reduces the credibility of choral utterances. In the *Antigone*, however, up to the last stanza, there are no first person verbs and only two first person possessive adjectives (110, 119). The rest of this very long ode, however, is in the third person of the impersonal narrator: the events are presented in *diegesis*.

Secondly, the *choreutai* display a greater knowledge of the previous day's fighting than they ought to as a stage figure. As I explained in

¹⁴ Swift, 2010, pp. 115-7, notes that Alcibiades' participation in the Olympic games with seven chariots was actually interpreted negatively by many Athenians: as an attempt at personal aggrandisement. His point, however, reflects the Greek view that athletes were believed to possess abilities that went beyond pure sporting prowess.

¹⁵ Some critics dispute that Creon acted as a general in the defence of Thebes. For a discussion, see Appendix A in Ehrenberg, 1954.

chapter 1, this indicates the intrusion of the meta-diegetic voice, a voice from beyond the immediate dramatic context that appropriates the narrative technique of the Homeric storyteller who is omnipresent, moving about at will between different spaces and times, and omniscient, having access to all the characters' thoughts. Such communication takes place on a higher plane and is, therefore, more trustworthy. Let me show how this works in the *parodos*.

The *choreutai* start with a bird's eye view of the land, now free of the aggressor. They then leap back in time to the beginning of the enemy invasion and the failed attack on the city. This is also presented from above, as if seen, metaphorically, by the Argive 'eagle' (ἀετός, 113). Next, they zoom in on the battle itself, giving a close-up of the Capaneus figure who has reached the top of the battlements, is sure of victory (133), but is struck by Zeus' thunderbolt and falls back to the ground (134). Finally, they round off this particular scene with two comments: the first contains a brief insight into the torchbearer's mind, his surprise at being struck ('this indeed went otherwise [than he expected]', εἶχε δ' ἄλλα τὰ μέν, 138); the second asserts that the entire Argive army was defeated because 'mighty Ares struck it hard' (στυφελίζων μέγας Ἄρης, 140). With another spatial and temporal leap, the *choreutai* turn to 'the seven commanders posted against the seven gates' (ἐπτά λοχαγοὶ γὰρ ἐφ' ἐπτά πύλαις / ταχθέντες, 141-2), then zoom in on just one gate, the one where Eteocles and Polynices are set against each other, and describe how the brothers die at each other's hands (147). The chorus as a character in the play could not simultaneously have been present at all these scenes and observed them in so much detail. Instead, the meta-diegetic voice of the omniscient and omnipresent storyteller has intruded into the discourse, making it trustworthy.

The style is elevated, too, especially in the description of the Argive attack on Thebes (110-26), and, as I explained in chapter 1, this signals the

presence of the extra-diegetic voice. At the beginning of the passage an 'eagle screaming loudly' (ὀξέα κλάζων / αἰετός, 112-13) is introduced as a metaphor for the enemy army with Polynices at their helm. In antistrophe A, however, references to the bird and the army continuously overlap: at the beginning of the stanza, the enemy is described as 'standing above the houses' (στὰς δ' ὑπὲρ μελάθρων, 116). The participle 'standing' is a suitable word for an army; it immediately morphs, however, into the eagle hovering above the city. The bird's beak is 'gaping wide' (ἀμφιχανών, 117), yet it contains 'blood-thirsty spears' (φονώ-/σαισιν [...] λόγχαίς, 116/8). Its 'mouth' (στόμα, 118) is 'seven-gated' (ἐπτάπυλον, 118), like the Theban walls. Prominence, then, is given to the *act* of narration (*how* the message is conveyed) rather than the narrative (*what* is conveyed). This emphasises the skill of the extra-diegetic voice which has composed the song. The communication is on the highest level, making the chorus's assessment of the danger to their city sound authoritative.

The extra-diegetic voice also intrudes into the discourse in a different way, by evoking another tragedy that deals with the civil war in Thebes: Aeschylus' *Septem*. As I suggested earlier, the scene with the unnamed torchbearer (127-137) mirrors the Capaneus passage in the Aeschylean play (*Sept.* 422-56): in both tragedies, this Argive soldier's main characteristic is boastfulness (*Sept.* 425, *Ant.* 127), he carries fire (*Sept.* 432, *Ant.* 135), defies Zeus, and is punished for his vaunting (*Sept.* 427-9, *Ant.* 131-3). There are verbal echoes, too, in the description of the army as a whole, and the language here also evokes Homer's *Iliad*: in the epic and in the plays, the Argives are described as 'white-shielded' (*Sept.* 89, *Ant.* 106, *Il.* 22.294), and they wear 'helmets with horsehair plumes' (*Sept.* 114, *Ant.* 116, *Il.* 6.469).¹⁶ The portrayal is made more vivid, the danger sounds graver by having it dialogise with the earlier intertexts.

¹⁶ Davidson, 1983, closely analyses these poetic precedents.

Crucially, however, in Aeschylus, there is some ambiguity about the causes of the civil war: the messenger who reveals that Eteocles will be set against his own brother recounts that Polynices intends to punish his brother for being his 'dishonourer' (ἀτιμαστικῶρα, 537), for having driven him from Thebes (*Sept.* 637-8).¹⁷ Moreover, after Eteocles' own exit to the battlefield, both the messenger and the chorus stress the communality of the brothers' fates (734-9, 811-19, 848-50) and, after their deaths at each other's hands, they lament both of them equally (854-60).¹⁸ The extra-diegetic voice, then, is using the Aeschylean intertext to suggest that the reasons for the Argive attack on Thebes are more complex than the chorus make them out to be and that both brothers carry some responsibility for the civil war.¹⁹

There are further indications which suggest this. Towards the beginning of the ode, the quarrels resulting in the Argive attack are described as 'contentious' (ἀμφιλόγων, 111): ἀμφιλόγος literally means 'with reasons on both sides', and the word acts as a subtle reminder that, in myth and drama, the strife was not brought about solely by Polynices. Later, in the description of their deadly encounter, the brothers are presented on equal terms: they are 'both wretched' (τοῖν στυγεροῖν, 144), were *both* born from *one* father and *one* mother (πατρός ἑνὸς / μητρός τε μιᾶς φύντε, 144-5), and 'both share a *common* death' (ἔχετον / κοινοῦ θανάτου μέρος ἄμφω, 146-7). In Greek, the dual is used throughout the

¹⁷ Cf. The same ambiguity is introduced in two further tragedies: in Euripides' *Phoenissae*, Eteocles and Polynices agree to alternate their rule annually, but Eteocles refuses to give up the throne after a year and drives his brother into permanent exile (69-76). In Sophocles' *Oedipus Coloneus*, Eteocles deprives Polynices of the throne (375-6) although, at 1295-6, with the support of the people.

¹⁸ Scholars now believe that the scene where the two sisters mourn their brothers, Antigone lamenting the death of Polynices, Ismene that of Eteocles, is not how Aeschylus conceived the play but that the new ending was composed later, influenced by Sophocles' *Antigone*. For an analysis of the debate and the relevant bibliography, see Hutchinson, 1985, pp. 209-11. Nonetheless, as Hutchinson concludes, 'ever since Eteocles' departure the poet [...] has been treating the brothers as morally equal' (p. 210).

¹⁹ See Tralau, 2008, for a number of further indications in the *parodos* of what he calls the 'mutual guilt' (p. 237) of the two brothers.

section, emphasising the similarity of the siblings. This, implicitly, raises questions about the king's decision to bury one brother with full honours, while denying the other any funerary rites whatsoever.

Finally, the authoritativeness of the choral discourse is undermined because, in the very last stanza, the Elders reveal their lack of real epistemological insight: they exhort themselves 'to forget' the recent war (θέσθαι λησμοσύναν, 151) and to visit all the temples of the city to give thanks to the gods. From the prologue, the audience know that Antigone is planning to transgress Creon's edict. The Elders' hope, then, is misplaced: they will *not* be able to forget the recent war. They now perform on the primary level of communication and function as an intra-diegetic voice. Their assessment is not trustworthy.

Let me sum up what we have found in the *parodos*: first, the language of the *choreutai* mixes lexis from two semantic fields, one hieratic, the other athletic. Since the confrontation between Creon and Antigone has not yet started, the voices are fused within the same discourse and the Elders still respond harmoniously to the retreat of the Argive forces. Retrospectively, however, this is the first hint that the group's response will not be univocal but that it contains two voices.

Secondly, the chorus's descriptions, comments, and judgements initially sound trustworthy because of the intrusion of the meta-diegetic voice. In the last stanza, however, it becomes clear that the Elders do not have any special insight since, from the prologue, the audience know that their optimism is misplaced.

Finally, the extra-diegetic voice emphasises the danger to Thebes from Polynices and his army. At the same time, however, verbal and dialogic triggers suggest that the strife between the two brothers may be more complex than the chorus as an intra-diegetic voice allow. Overall, then, the true authoritativeness of the choral voice is ambiguous.

2. THE FIRST *STASIMON* (332-75)

The first *stasimon* is performed after Creon has set out the principles of his kingship and confirmed what Antigone told Ismene in the prologue: Eteocles is to be given a funeral with full rites while the corpse of Polynices is to be left ‘unburied for birds and dogs to eat and savage’ (ἄθαπτον καὶ πρὸς οἰωνῶν [...] καὶ πρὸς κυνῶν ἐδεσπὸν αἰκισθέν τ’, 205-6).²⁰ A guard, however, almost immediately reports that Polynices’ body has been sprinkled with dust and that ‘the necessary rites have been performed’ (καφαγιστεύσας ἅ χρή, 247) ‘to avoid pollution’ (ἄγος φεύγοντος, 256). The king incorrectly attributes the action to wider dissent in the city (289-92), accuses the sentinel of having been bribed (293-314), and threatens to have him and his fellow guards strung up unless they hand over the perpetrator (304-9). He then exits into the palace.

It is now that the *choreutai* sing an *encomium* of Man (ἄνθρώπου, 333; ἀνὴρ, 347). It consists of two strophic pairs in which the chorus extol Man’s superiority on the sea and on land (strophe A), praise his dominion over the animal world (antistrophe A), commend him for his temperament and intellect which make him suited to living in cities (strophe B), and pay tribute to his wisdom (antistrophe B). At the end, however, they also warn that he must not overreach himself and pray that they themselves will never associate with anyone of excessive daring.

Initially it is unclear how the first *stasimon* fits into the play since there is no specific reference to the action, and the discourse is so general

²⁰ For a discussion of the Athenian law that forbade the burial of traitors in Athenian territory, see Holt, 1999, pp. 663-6, Liapis, 2013, pp. 89-90, and Cairns, 2016, pp. 37-42. Liapis mentions a number of ancient sources that refer to the legality of the non-burial of traitors on Athenian territory. He does, however, not take into account that Polynices’ body is being exposed specifically to be desecrated and that this fact is first presented to the audience by a distraught Antigone. The guard’s reaction to the burial (especially 247 and 256) and the *coryphaeus*’s suggestion that the deed may have been divinely inspired (278) further dispose spectators against the edict and focuses our sympathy on Antigone. See Heath, 1987, especially pp. 90-98, for the idea of ‘personal focus’, i.e. that a character can serve as ‘a centre of sympathetic attention’ (p. 91).

that it is ambiguous to whom it alludes. This has led to conflicting interpretations: Brown (1987), for instance, writes that the *choreutai* sing about the person who buried Polynices, someone ‘of extreme cleverness’ (p. 154) since he managed to elude the guards. Crane (1989), on the other hand, believes that ‘Creon’s ostentatiously selfless pose [i.e. that he will put the country above any ties of friendship and family (182-3)] [...] has provided the chorus with its point of departure’ (p. 111). In my view, however, the first *stasimon*, like the *parodos*, fuses two different choral voices: the first voice praise Man and thereby indirectly extol Creon’s virtues; the second warn against human hubris and so obliquely criticise the king.²¹ At the end of the last stanza, the *choreutai* specifically sing that Man needs to ‘honour the laws of the land’ (νόμους γεραίρων χθονός, 368) and ‘the sworn justice of the gods’ (θεῶν [...] ἔνορκον δίκαν, 369). The two voices, then, are the same as in the *parodos*, one concerned with the *polis*, the other with the gods.²² Throughout the ode, the civic voice present an optimistic view of human progress; the hieratic voice, however, raise questions about this portrayal. Let me show this in more detail.

²¹ Cf. Jens, 1967: ‘Der Chor [singt] Vordergründiges und Hintergründiges. Vordergründig, auf die Situation bezogen, meint er mit dem ἄπολις (370), den er verflucht, den Frevler, der das königliche Gebot übertrat. Hintergründig aber meint er Kreon, den Frevler, der das Gebot der Götter mißachtet. [...] Er trifft den Augenblick und benennt das Ganze: und beides nicht nacheinander, sondern mit dem gleichen Wort’ (p. 300).

²² Creon, of course, also believes that he is acting in accordance with the will of the gods when he prohibits the burial (282-89) since Polynices ‘came to burn [the gods’] colonnaded temples and their offerings and to destroy their country and its laws’ (ἀμφικίονας / ναοὺς πυρώσων ἦλθε κἀναθήματα / καὶ γῆν ἐκείνων καὶ νόμους διασκεδῶν, 285-7). This claim may initially sound legitimate. A few lines later, however, he threatens to have the guard strung up for a crime which, the audience know, he did not commit. Creon believes that this is justified since ‘Zeus is revered through my authority’ (literally ‘Zeus holds fast through my reverence’, ἴσχει Ζεὺς [...] ἐξ ἐμοῦ σέβας, 304). His piety, then, is dubious since it is used to impose his will on his subjects, even when he is clearly in the wrong. More serious questions about his reverence of the gods are raised in his quarrel with Haemon (especially 743-5) and with Tiresias (particularly 1039-44). We will see, that Antigone’s stance is similarly problematised. As I said in the introduction, Sophoclean tragedy does not present one, and only one, viewpoint as correct but subtly examines the merits and demerits of all the positions.

The *stasimon* begins with an ambiguous statement: ‘many things are formidable, and none more formidable than man’ (πολλὰ τὰ δεινὰ κούδὲν ἀν/θρώπου δεινότερον πέλει (332-3). As Goheen (1951) and a number of later critics have pointed out, δεινός (‘formidable’) ‘opens a range of possible meanings’ (p. 53) because it has both positive and negative connotations: it can mean ‘awesome, wondrous, skilful, clever,’ and ‘aweful, terrible, fearful, strange’. The wording here, in fact, evokes the first *stasimon* of Aeschylus’ *Choephoroi* where the sense of δεινός is negative: the *choreutai* there sing about transgressive women and state that ‘many are the things the earth breeds, *aweful* and fearful ills’ (πολλὰ μὲν γὰρ τρέφει / δεινὰ καὶ δειμάτων ἄχη, 585-6). The opening statement of the first *stasimon* in the *Antigone*, then, does not necessarily imply praise.²³

Secondly, the language creates dialogic overtones that suggest that humans are actually overreaching themselves, even challenging the gods: the *choreutai* sing that Man crosses the sea in ‘a southerly *storm*’ (χειμερίῳ νότῳ, 335), ‘under engulfing waves’ (ὑπ’ περιβρυχίοισιν [...] οἴδμασιν, 336-7). Initially, this sounds like a tremendous achievement. Jebb (1900), however, notes that, in *Works and Days*, Hesiod warns anyone who needs to undertake a sea voyage against awaiting the ‘oncoming winter *storms* and the terrible gales of *Notus*’ (χειμῶν’ ἐπιόντα Νότοιο τε δεινὰς ἀήτας, 673). Notus is the god of the south wind who brings heavy weather in late-summer and early-autumn: in our ode, the use of νότῳ (southerly) combined with the compound περιβρύχιος (βρύχιος, ‘deep’, intensified by περι, ‘beyond measure, very, exceedingly’) implies that, by sailing when the waves are ‘over-deep’, Man is actually challenging the rules of the god Notus.

Agriculture and medicine, too, come across as transgressive. The plough is said to ‘wear away’ (ἀποτρύεται, 339) Earth, ‘imperishable,

²³ See Cairns, 2014, n. 4 for a bibliography of critics who have come to an ambivalent reading of the ode.

inexhaustible' (ἄφθιτον, ἀκαμάταν, 339): even in a supposedly innocuous activity such as working the land, then, Man violate a divinity. Finally, human attempts at healing are problematic: Man manages to escape 'irresistible diseases' (νόσων [...] ἀμηχάνων, 36), and even tries to 'procure flight from Hades' (Ἅϊδα [...] φεῦξιν [...] ἐπάξεται, 361). This, however, challenges Zeus' power over life and death, a privilege which, in myth, the Olympian defended by striking Asclepius with his thunderbolt, precisely for trying to bring a man back to life.²⁴ The mythological and poetic intertexts imply criticism and hint at a fracturing choral voice: while the civic voice praise Man for his achievements, the hieratic voice suggest arrogance.

In the course of the song, dialogic overtones also raise questions about the portrayal of the progress achieved by Man in another way: it indicates his arrogance because of any lack of reference to the gods. To understand this, I need briefly to discuss how attitudes to human development changed in the fifth century BCE.

According to Greek archaic thought, humankind declined with time: in his *Work and Days*, Hesiod, for instance, suggests that the gods created gradually deteriorating races of men (106-201): the first, golden, god-like and flawless; the second, silver, characterised by folly and hubris; the third, bronze, only interested in war and acts of violence; the fourth, the men-heroes of Troy and Thebes who destroy each other; finally, the fifth race, iron, the race of the audience's time, whose life is nothing but grievous care.

About the middle of the fifth century, however, the view emerged that human development should be seen in terms of progress, and this is

²⁴ For a discussion of the myth and its use in poetry, see Gantz, 1993, p. 91. Especially noteworthy references to Asclepius' punishment by Zeus are in Pindar *Pythian* 3 (55-8) and Euripides *Alcestis* (4, 121-9). Cairns, 2014, shows how Solon's *Musenelegie* (13 W) also functions as an intertext for the *stasima* in the *Antigone*.

reflected in contemporary works of poetry and philosophy.²⁵ In the *Prometheus Bound* (c. 460-456 BCE), for example, a play attributed to Aeschylus, the eponymous hero asserts that it was his theft of fire from Hephaestus and of the skills in the arts and crafts from Athene that enabled him to teach humans sense and reason, language, house-building, knowledge of astronomy and mathematics, writing, the yoking of animals, sailing, medicine and, finally, soothsaying, sacrifice and metalwork (442-506). Humanity, then, is improving over time.

Other works created after the *Antigone* reveal a similar stance: in Euripides' *Suppliant Women* (423-20 BCE), Theseus praises the gods for setting human life in order and for providing mortals with reason, language, agriculture, shelter, seafaring, and soothsaying (195-218); in Plato's *Protagoras*, written in the 390s-380s BCE but set in 432, the eponymous sophist explains how Prometheus' teaching of humans resulted in the worship of the gods, language, housing, clothing, bedding, and food (320c-322d). The fictive characters in Aeschylus, Euripides and Plato, then, are optimistic about human development.

One detail in all of these narratives, however, stands out: the gods play a role, not only in the initial creation of Man and the provision of certain skills, but also in the necessity of continued good relations between mortals and immortals. In the *Antigone*, on the other hand, ἐδιδάξατο (356), the rare and so striking middle form of the verb 'teach', suggests that man 'taught himself' or that humans 'taught each other'. The conspicuous absence of the gods is problematic: Man may not be praiseworthy but the embodiment of hubris.²⁶

In the last stanza, this implicit allusion to human arrogance is strengthened by a warning: the *choreutai* sing that, if someone reaches too

²⁵ Cf. Guthrie, 1971, pp. 60-68 (philosophical tradition) and pp. 79-81 (influence on poetry). Also Goldhill, 1986, chapter 9.

²⁶ For scholarly discussions of the concept of hubris see especially Fisher, 1992, and Cairns, 1996.

high, towards what lies ‘beyond hope’ (ὕπὲρ ἐλπίδ’, 366), this can lead to ‘evil’ (κακόν, 367) as well as to ‘good’ (ἐσθλόν, 367). These words evoke the king’s speeches earlier in the play. First, desiring something ‘beyond hope’ (ὕπὲρ ἐλπίδ’, 366) is reminiscent of his tenets of rule: he promised that he would listen to ‘the best counsels’ (τῶν ἀρίστων [...] βουλευμάτων, 179), not ‘keep his mouth shut because of some fear’ (ἐκ φόβου του γλῶσσαν ἐγκλήσας, 180), that he would be impartial in his decisions, and always put the ‘safety’ (σωτηρίας, 186) of Thebes above any ‘dear one’ (φίλον, 183). Such intentions are laudable but have already proved to be unrealistic:²⁷ the audience have already witnessed that, instead of listening to the *coryphaeus* who wondered whether Polynices’ burial was ‘prompted by the gods’ (θεήλατον, 278), the king responded with ‘rage’ (ὀργῆς, 280) and insulted the Elders, calling them ‘both fools and old men’ (ἄνους τε καὶ γέρον, 280). He similarly overreacted and misjudged the situation when Polynices’ burial was reported: instead of believing the guard, he falsely accused him of having been bribed by men in the city who refuse to ‘keep their necks beneath the yoke, as justice demands’ (οὐδ’ ὑπὸ ζυγῶ / λόφον δικαίως εἶχον, 291-2). The word ‘yoke’ has overtones of tyranny: we sense that, with his principles of rule, Creon is wishing for something ‘beyond hope’ (ὕπὲρ ἐλπίδ’, 366). His purpose may be ‘good’ (ἐσθλόν, 367), but it is already beginning to turn to ‘evil’ (κακόν, 367).

The horizontal overtones encourage spectators to interpret the next comment in this *stasimon* as a reference to the new ruler, too. Now, however, their words have a proleptic quality. The *choreutai* sing that ‘on account of his recklessness’ (τόλμας χάριν, 371), such a man is likely to fall from his position ‘high in the city’ (ὕψιπολις, 370). The Elders as a

²⁷ In his speech ‘About the False Embassy’, the third-century orator Demosthenes uses the last of Creon’s tenets of rule to criticise his adversary Aeschines for being unlike Creon (19.248.2-4). For a rejection of the idea that this ‘proves positive characterization’ of the king, see Cairns, 2016, p. 165, n. 50.

dramatis persona obviously have no awareness of the ending of the play: the extra-diegetic voice that knows about the overarching shape, the *gestalt*, of the play intrudes into the discourse to foreshadows the action to come.²⁸

Let me conclude my analysis of the first *stasimon* by briefly discussing the overall authoritativeness of the discourse. Initially, the utterances sound trustworthy since the description of Man's progress is made entirely in the third person of the impersonal narrator: the communication takes place in the diegetic mode. Moreover, as we have just seen, the proleptic utterances foreshadowing the king's eventual downfall hint at the presence of the extra-diegetic voice. In the very last sentence of the ode, however, the mode changes: when the *choreutai* express the wish that the person 'who does *these things*' (ὅς τὰδ' ἔρδει, 375) may not sit 'at *my* hearth' (ἐμοὶ παρέστιος, 372), they sing as an intra-diegetic voice who are trying to make sense of the events but, being unaware of Antigone's plans, have no special insight. Indeed, the masculine relative pronoun (ὅς) demonstrates how misguided they are: they seem to believe that the burier is a man.²⁹ There is, then, the same tension as in the *parodos*, between utterances that sound trustworthy and those that are not.

To sum up: initially, the first *stasimon* appears to be a straight-forward *encomium* of Man. The ambiguity inherent in the word δεινός ('awesome', 'aweful') in the opening statement, however, immediately problematises this reading. Further details suggest that some of Man's achievements are, in fact, a sign of his hubris. There are, then, two voices in the discourse,

²⁸ Cf. Winnington-Ingram, 1980: 'It is characteristic of the odes of this play that they tend, ironically, to carry a secondary reference to Creon which cannot be in the minds of the singers' (p. 97).

²⁹ The masculine is, of course, the default gender in Greek but the *coryphaeus*'s surprise at Antigone's entry a few lines later (379) strengthens the impression that he expected a man.

one optimistic about man's progress, the other more critical. The final stanza, where the *choreutai* stress that Man needs to live *both* by the 'laws of the land' *and* by the 'justice of the gods', suggests that the two voices are the same as in the *parodos*, one concerned with the city, the other with the gods.

Secondly, as the ode proceeds, there is a growing sense that it is not a generalised description of human development but an oblique comment on Creon: it is his hopes that are misguided and it is he who will slide into evil. The extra-diegetic voice, then, intrudes into the choral discourse to undermine the optimistic first line of communication and this makes it more difficult to assess the authoritativeness of the choral voice as a whole.

3. THE SECOND *STASIMON* (582-630)

The second *stasimon* consists of two strophic pairs. It is performed, with Creon still on stage,³⁰ after Antigone has been exposed as the burier of Polynices. In an impassioned speech to the king, she defends her deed claiming that she acted in accordance with the 'unwritten and unfailing ordinances of the gods' (ἄγραπτα καὶ σφαλῇ θεῶν / νόμιμα, 454-5). Creon, on the other hand, accuses her of displaying insolence (ὕβριζεν, 480; ὕβρις, 482) because she has transgressed against the city's 'prescribed laws' (νόμους [...] τοὺς προκειμένους, 481). In accordance with his 'proclamation' (κήρυγμα, 8), therefore, and because of his promise not to privilege his family or friends (183, 657), he condemns her to death.³¹ Since

³⁰ Unusually, the second *stasimon* is not performed in the absence of all stage figures. At the end of their song, the chorus-leader only announces Haemon's arrival. Creon, therefore, must have been present during the ode.

³¹ For the debate surrounding the difference between κήρυγμα (proclamation), νόμος (law) and νόμιμα (customs, ordinances), see the commentary by Griffith, 1999, pp. 201-2; Ehrenberg, 1954, especially pp. 34-7; de Romilly, 2002, pp. 29-38; Hester, 1980, particularly p. 6. If we analyse the use of these terms throughout the play, it emerges that when, in the prologue (8, 32) and in her confrontation with Creon (450, 454), Antigone calls the king's edict 'proclamation' (κήρυγμα), she does so in order to set it apart from

he falsely assumes that Ismene is implicated in the burial, he also imposes the same penalty on her (488-9). The conflict is now well underway, and this is reflected in the choral response. The two voices are no longer fused but break apart, illuminating the action from opposite angles: in strophe and antistrophe A, the civic voice blame the confrontation on Antigone and so indirectly support the king; in strophe and antistrophe B, the hieratic voice emphasise the power of Zeus and warn against delusion, thus obliquely censuring Creon.

The ode starts with a general statement: 'fortunate are those whose lifetime has never tasted evil' (εὐδαίμονες οἷσι κακῶν ἄγευστος αἰὼν, 583). This is followed by an explanation (γάρ, 'for'): 'for to those whose house is shaken by the gods, no ruin is wanting, as it marches against the whole of the family' (οἷς γὰρ ἂν σεισθῇ θεόθεν δόμος, ἄτας / οὐδὲν ἐλλείπει γενεᾶς ἐπὶ πλῆθος ἔρπον, 584-5). Both *gnōmē* and elucidation are directly relevant to Antigone: in the prologue, Ismene reminded her sister of the disasters that have occurred in their family; Oedipus' unwitting murder of his father Laius, his subsequent unsuspecting marriage to his mother, the suicide of his mother-wife when she realises her son-husband's identity, and the king's own self-blinding (49-57). Another calamity has recently shaken the house; the killing at each other's hands of Oedipus' two sons. Now the death sentence on his two daughters, imposed because of Antigone's burial of Polynices, threatens to wipe out the entire family, making their 'ruin' (ἄτας, 584) complete.

what she sees as the 'unfailing and unwritten ordinances of the gods' (ἄγραπτα καὶ σφαλῇ θεῶν νόμιμα, 454-5). Creon talks about his edict as a 'proclamation' when referring to its physical announcement (to the chorus at 192; to Antigone at 447). Otherwise he refers to it as 'laws' (νόμους, 449, 481). Ismene (59), the chorus (382), and eventually even Antigone (847) call Creon's edict 'law' (νόμου, 59; νόμοις, 382, 847). The use of the different words, then, subtly reflects each speaker's intention. De Romilly, 2002, concludes that 'il y a donc [...] une sorte d'équivalence sommaire entre les termes' (p. 30).

In the antistrophe, the reference to Antigone becomes more concrete. The *choreutai* sing, 'ancient are the miseries of the Labdacid House; I see them falling hard upon earlier miseries of the dead' (ἀρχαῖα τὰ Λαβδακιδᾶν οἴκων ὀρῶμαι / πῆματα φθιτῶν ἐπὶ πῆμασι πίπτοντ', 594-5): the recent calamities are part of a familial trend, reaching from Labdacus, Oedipus' grandfather, to his own four children. It is true, there seemed to be some promise: a 'light spread out in the house of Oedipus' (ὁ τέτατο φάος ἐν Οἰδίπου δόμοις, 600) in Antigone's betrothal to Creon's son Haemon (568). The death sentence on the two sisters, however, shows that, for the Labdacid house, there is indeed 'no means of deliverance' (οὐδ' [...] λύσιν, 597).³²

Initially, the recurring disasters in the family are attributed to the gods (θεόθεν, 584; θεῶν τις, 597). The last line, however, implies that it is Antigone herself who is responsible: the last hope for the house has been extinguished by 'folly in speech (*anoia*, 'lack of understanding') and the Erinyes of the *mind* (*phrenōn*)' (λόγου τ' ἄνοια καὶ φρενῶν Ἐρινύς, 603). Verbal echoes link the words to the young woman. She has twice been accused of folly: at the end of the prologue, when she left to bury Polynices, her own sister Ismene called her 'foolish' (ἄνους, 'lacking in understanding', 99); later, when she was brought in by the guard, the *coryphaeus* asked whether she had been detected 'in folly?' (ἐν ἀφροσύνῃ, 379-81). The word for folly is *aphrosunē* ('mindlessness'), from *phrēn* (φρήν, 'mind'), and this word now recurs in this *stasimon* in 'Erinyes of the *mind*' (φρενῶν Ἐρινύς, 603): Antigone's mind, this voice believe, is clouded by the Erinyes, the avenging spirit punishing the family for the transgressions of this and earlier generations.

Finally, the *choreutai* sing specifically about 'folly in speech' (λόγου [...] ἄνοια, 603) and this, too, is reminiscent of Antigone's conduct: in the

³² See Goldhill, 2009, on *lusi*.

episode just gone, she concluded her long, impassioned oration in justification of her burial of Polynices with a personal insult of Creon: ‘if you think my actions silly, that amounts to a charge of silliness by a silly man!’ (σοὶ δ’ εἰ δοκῶ νῦν μῶρα δρῶσα τυγχάνειν, / σχεδόν τι μῶρῳ μωρίαν ὀφλισκάνω, 469-70). For Creon, this was yet another proof of her insolence (ὑβρις, 482), and he immediately pronounced his death sentences. The *stasimon* now suggests that the disaster is due to the Erinyes in Antigone’s mind, which has manifested itself in her aggressive defiance. This indirectly exculpates Creon: in the first two stanzas we hear the civic voice, and they have now aligned themselves with the king.

The second strophic pair is different, and this has puzzled many scholars: the discourse no longer seems to be about Antigone but suddenly points to Creon. He, however, is not a member of the Labdacid house about which the *choreutai* sang in the previous stanza but only related to it by marriage, through his sister Jocasta. Easterling (1978b, p. 144), therefore, proposes that the calamities (κακῶν, 582) mentioned in the first line of the *stasimon* spread laterally, engulfing anyone connected with the family. In my view, however, there is a switch to another voice and with it a change of application.

First, the *choreutai* sing a long passage about the supremacy of Zeus: his vigilance (he never sleeps, 606), his agelessness (time does not weary him, 607-8), his supreme power (he is the master of Olympus, 608), and his ‘dazzling glory’ (μαρμαρόεσσαν αἴγλαν, 610). This marks the switch to the hieratic voice. Secondly, they use a gendered noun: ‘Zeus, what transgression of *men* (ἄνδρῶν, 604-5) could restrict your power (τεάν, Ζεῦ, δύνασιν τίς ἄνδρῶν ὑπερβασία κατάσχοι, 604-5)? This suggests that they are commenting on a *male* character.³³ Finally, they refer to a

³³ The noun ἀνὴρ (‘man’, 604-5), of course, need not be gender specific. In other contexts, it is used simply to differentiate between mortals and immortals, for instance, in Book 1 of the *Iliad*, in the description of Zeus as ‘father of both *men* and gods’ (πατὴρ ἀνδρῶν τε

‘transgression’ (ὑπερβασία, 604) *against Zeus*. This resonates with Antigone’s criticism of the king: in her justification of the burial of Polynices, she said that the king’s edict was not strong enough ‘to *transgress* (ὑπερδραμεῖν, 455), mortal that you are, *the gods’ ordinances* (454-5). The parallels suggest that the reference is now to Creon and, as Cairns (2016, p. 32) writes, his presence on stage visually heightens the possibility.

This impression is reinforced when, in antistrophe B, the *choreutai* sing that ‘widely wandering hope brings advantage to many *men*, but to many the deception of empty-minded desires’ (ἀ γὰρ δὴ πολὺπλαγκτος ἐλ/πίς πολλοῖς μὲν ὄνασις ἀνδρῶν, / πολλοῖς δ’ ἀπάτα κουφονόων ἐρώτων, 615-17). Again we have the gendered noun (ἀνδρῶν, ‘men’) which hints at Creon. Moreover, the discourse evokes the first *stasimon*: there, the *choreutai* warned that Man, ‘clever [...] beyond *hope*’ (σοφόν [...] ὑπὲρ ἐλπίδ’, 365), ‘sometimes advances to *evil*, at other times to *good*’ (τοτὲ μὲν κακόν, ἄλλοτ’ ἐπ’ ἐσθλὸν ἔρπει, 366). Now they similarly comment that ‘widely wandering *hope*’, (πολὺπλαγκτος ἐλ/πίς, 615-16) leads to ‘the deception of *empty-minded desires*’ (ἀπάτα κουφονόων ἐρώτων, 617), and that the perpetrator does not notice this until it is too late since ‘*evil* seems to be *good* to him whose mind the god is driving towards ruin’ (τὸ κακὸν δοκεῖν ποτ’ ἐσθλὸν / τῷδ’ ἔμμεν ὅτῳ φρένας / θεὸς ἄγει πρὸς ἄταν, 622-4).³⁴ The two discourses dialogise, suggesting that this voice are critical of Creon and, by implication, sympathetic to Antigone’s claim. Now that the confrontation is well underway, the two

θεῶν τε, 544) or in Book 18 where Thetis complains that ‘of all the daughters of the sea, [Zeus] subdued me to a (*mortal*) man’ (ἐκ μὲν μ’ ἀλλάων ἀλιάων ἀνδρὶ δάμασσε, 432). In the first *stasimon*, however, there also was a shift from the ungendered ‘human being’ (ἀνθρώπου, 332-3) to the gendered ‘man’ (ἀνὴρ, 347) and there, too, it occurred precisely at the point where the discourse suggested a reference to Creon, as the *choreutai* employed the politically charged words ‘he rules’ (κρατεῖ, 347) and ‘with a yoke’ (ζυγῷ, 351).

³⁴ See Cropp, 1997, pp. 143-7, for an examination of the terms for good and bad sense, thinking, counsel, judgment, learning, and decision.

voices have aligned themselves with the protagonists: the civic voice have become ‘pro-Creon’, the hieratic voice ‘pro-Antigone’.

One term, however, stands out in the analysis of *both* voices: *atē* (ἄτη, ‘ruin’). It is repeated four times (584, 614, 624, 625), always in emphatic position at the end of a verse. So far, I have translated *atē* as ‘ruin’ but the concept is more complex and warrants further discussion.³⁵

As I briefly said in the *Philoctetes* chapter, in Homer, ‘ἄτη is a state of mind – a temporary clouding or bewildering of the normal consciousness, [...] a partial and temporary insanity’ (Dodds, 1951, p. 5). It, together with the related term *apatē* (deception), is most widely associated with Agamemnon in the *Iliad* and his decision to take Briseis from Achilles. In Book 9 the leader of the Greeks explains his fatal mistake with the words: ‘great Zeus son of Cronus ensnared me in grievous blindness (*atē*)’ and ‘planned cruel deception (*apatē*)’ (Ζεὺς με μέγα Κρονίδης ἄτη ἐνέδησε βαρείη, 9.18; κακὴν ἀπάτην βουλεύσατο, 9. 21). Later, in Book 19, he uses *atē* specifically to extricate himself from blame: ‘It is not I who is responsible, but Zeus and Fate and the Erinys, who walks in darkness, who cast fierce blindness (*atē*) [...] on my mind’ (ἐγὼ δ’ οὐκ αἰτιός εἰμι, / ἀλλὰ Ζεὺς καὶ Μοῖρα καὶ ἡεροφοῖτις Ἑρινύς, / οἳ τέ μοι [...] φρεσὶν ἔμβalon ἄγριον ἄτην, 19.86-8). There are some actions, Agamemnon argues, for which a man cannot be held responsible because his judgement has been clouded by the gods.

In Aeschylus, the gods still blind human minds: in the *Persae*, for instance, neither the messenger nor the queen blames Xerxes for the terrible naval defeat at Salamis because they believe that it was brought about by an outside force, an ‘evil spirit’ (κακὸς δαίμων, 354). The ghost of Darius, however, corrects this view, saying that the disaster was due to his son’s ‘empty hopes’ (κεναῖσιν ἐλπίσιν, 804), his lack of ‘sound

³⁵ Cf. Dodds, 1951, pp. 5-6 and pp. 37-8. For a more recent discussion, see Sommerstein, 2013, with bibliography, p. 12, n. 1.

judgement' (εὐβουλία, 749), and his 'arrogance' (ὕβρις, 821): this is why Zeus punished him with 'deception' (ἀπάταν, 107) and 'ruin' (ἄτης, 822).³⁶ In the *Persae*, then, the term is used slightly differently from Homer: it now suggests an element of personal guilt.

Sommerstein (2013) writes that 'in Sophocles, and even more in Euripides [...] *atē* often means merely "disaster, ill-fortune" with no particular reference to its cause, not even an ironic one' (p. 11). In my view, however, this is not necessarily the case in Sophocles. We already saw this in chapter 2, in my discussion of Philoctetes' mental state. The same is true now, in the second *stasimon* of the *Antigone*: although the pro-Creon voice initially blame the ruin (ἄτας, 584) of the Labdacid house on the gods, they later identify Antigone's aggressive insubordination, 'folly in speech and the Erinys in the mind' (λόγου τ' ἄνοια καὶ φρενῶν Ἐρινύς, 603) as, at least, a contributing factor. The same applies to Creon: although the pro-Antigone voice make the gods responsible for Creon's future 'ruin' (ἄταν, 624), they also refer to the king's obstinacy: 'the deception of empty-minded desires' (ἀπάτα κουφονόων ἐρώτων, 617).³⁷ The term, then, suggests that the root cause behind the disasters is *atē*, human delusion, and that both Creon and Antigone are affected by it.

To conclude: the confrontation between Creon and Antigone, prepared for in the prologue, has erupted and, in the second *stasimon*, the *choreutai* try to make sense of the conflict by illuminating it from two standpoints, each taken by a different voice. In strophe and antistrophe A, what I identified as the civic voice in the *parodos* comment on Antigone's motivation: although they initially make the gods responsible for the calamity that is threatening to wipe out the last survivors of the Labdacid house, they also blame the young woman herself, drawing attention to *atē* which has

³⁶ See also Cairns, 2013, pp. xii-xiii.

³⁷ See Holt, 1999, on Creon's error, anger and obstinacy.

manifested itself in her aggressive defiance of authority. The civic voice, then, come across as critical of Antigone and, by implication, supportive of the king: they have become specifically pro-Creon.

The hieratic voice of the entry song take over the discourse in strophe and antistrophe B, and the switch is sign-posted by the emphasis on the divine (Zeus's supremacy), and by the use of the gendered noun 'man' (ἄνδρῶν, 604, 616). Verbal and thematic echoes also suggest that it is Creon who is transgressing Zeus' power. The root cause, however, is the same as for Antigone: *atē*, an aberration of the mind, the king's insistence on the absolute validity of his edict. The hieratic voice, then, criticise Creon and, implicitly, align themselves with his niece: they have become pro-Antigone.

Finally, as in the first *stasimon*, the extra-diegetic voice intrudes into the discourse of the last stanza with obliquely proleptic utterances that foreshadow Creon's downfall. The fact that Antigone is also presented as suffering from *atē*, however, subtly prepares for the punishment of both stage figures.

4. THE THIRD *STASIMON* (781-800)

The third *stasimon* consists of a single strophic pair. It is performed after another *agōn*, this time between Creon and his son: Haemon repeatedly assures his father of his respect and support (635-8, 683-6, 701-4), but also tells him that the city (πόλις, 693) and its inhabitants (ὁμόπολις λεώς, 'the people of this city', 733) approve of Antigone's actions. The king refuses to accept this, and accuses him of being infatuated with his bride.³⁸ There follows a fierce argument about what makes a ruler 'righteous' (662,

³⁸ Von Fritz, 1934, discusses why Haemon does not declare his love for Antigone. He argues that his argument would lose all its power if it were motivated by passion for Antigone (p. 21-2). Instead, the young man hopes to change his father's mind by showing that he is not acting with *justice* towards Antigone (p. 24). Similarly Müller, 1967, n. 8, p. 231.

667, 671, 728, 742, 743, all of the δίκη ('justice') root). Contrary to his initial principles of governance, Creon now claims 'rule by obedience' (πειθαρχία, 676) for himself: all his commands must be carried out 'in small things, in justice and in its opposite' (καὶ σμικρὰ καὶ δίκαια καὶ τάναντία, 667). Moreover, any dissent is a sign of 'insubordination', (ἀναρχία 672). Haemon, on the other hand, suggests that a good leader must listen to advice (723), be flexible (705-18), and learn from his mistakes (710, 723). The episode ends with Creon's angry threat to have Antigone killed immediately, in front of his son, and Haemon storming out saying that he will never see his father again. When the *coryphaeus* asks the king if he will really have both sisters executed, Creon unexpectedly pardons Ismene. He then commutes Antigone's sentence: instead of having her stoned to death, she will be taken to a lonely cave to be buried alive.³⁹

It is now that the *choreutai* sing the short third *stasimon*, ascribing the terrible quarrel to the power of Love.⁴⁰ Burton (1980) writes that 'the relevance of the song is [...] strictly limited, for it touches on a theme which occupies a very subordinate place. [...] Unlike the two preceding songs [...] it ignores all the ethical implication of what Creon and Haemon said to each other in their set speeches' (p. 117). In my view Burton is only partly right. I agree that the *choreutai* are misguided in their evaluation of the action: although their discourse again contains two separate voices and, therefore, offers two different interpretation, ultimately, their

³⁹ For execution by stoning in ancient Greece, see Rosivach, 1987

⁴⁰ The power of love is a commonplace in Greek poetry. See, for instance, Hesiod *Theogony* (120-2), Homeric *Hymn to Aphrodite* (especially 2-3 and 34-7), Euripides *Hippolytus* (first *stasimon*, 525-64; fourth *stasimon*, 1267-81). In Sophocles' *fr.* 941P, Cypris 'is Hades, she is immortal life, she is raving madness, she is unmixed desire, she is lamentation; in her is all activity, all tranquillity, all that leads to violence' (ἔστιν μὲν Ἄιδης, ἔστι δ' ἄφθιτος βίος, / ἔστιν δὲ λύσσα μανίας, ἔστι δ' ἴμερος / ἄκρατος, ἔστ' οἰμωγμός, 3-5). In the *Trachiniae*, Deianeira says that someone who stands up to Eros 'does not think sensibly' (οὐ καλῶς φρονεῖ, 442), and she describes Heracles' sexual appetite in terms of 'disease' (νόσῳ, 445).

attribution of the quarrel to erotic love is not credible. The extra-diegetic voice, however, suggests a third reading, and this is reliable. Let me show this. I shall start by discussing the two voices.

The whole ode is addressed to Eros (Ἔρως, 781, 782) and stresses the god's power: in the strophe the *choreutai* sing that he is 'invincible in battle' (ἀνίκατε μάχαν, 781), that he is ubiquitous (785-6), and that neither immortals nor mortals can escape him (787-9). He is also dangerous: when 'you [Eros] spend the night on a girl's soft cheeks' (ἐν μαλακαῖς παρειαιῖς νεάνιδος ἐννυχεύεις, 783), this is obviously pleasurable, but those affected find that 'you fall on their property' (ἐν κτήμασι πίπτεις, 782) and that love makes you 'mad' (μέμηνεν, 790). The whole stanza recalls Creon's argumentation in the quarrel just gone: although Haemon promised to be guided by his father's 'good judgements' (γνώμας [...] / χρηστάς, 635-6), his sexual attraction to Antigone, so Creon claimed, made him the 'slave of a woman' (γυναικὸς [...] δούλευμα, 756). This is why he defied his father and why, *maddened* by love, he stormed out. We hear the pro-Creon voice siding with the king.

The antistrophe is different: the *choreutai* also address Eros ('you', σὺ, 791, 793) but they now sing that 'you wrench the minds even of the *just* aside from *justice*, to ruin' (σὺ καὶ δικαίων ἀδίκους / φρένας παρασπᾶς ἐπὶ λῶβᾳ, 701-2). The discourse evokes Haemon's point of view in the quarrel: he said that he was intervening because he wanted 'what is *just*' (τὸ [...] δίκαιον, 728) and because he was concerned that Creon was 'erring against *justice*' (δίκαια [...] ἐξαμαρτάνονθ', 743).⁴¹ The

⁴¹ Creon, of course, also believes that justice is on his side: as we saw, he earlier asserted that the Thebans must 'justly' (δικαίως, 292) keep their necks 'beneath the yoke' (ὕπὸ ζυγῷ, 291). Dialogic overtones, however, problematised this claim: many spectators in democratic Athens will have perceived the word 'yoke' as an indication of Creon's tyrannical leanings. In the Haemon scene, too, he argued that he was acting 'justly' (662, 667, 671) but his argument was again undermined: by his angry questions whether he should rule the land 'for another or for myself' (ἄλλῳ [...] ἢ 'μοι, 736) and whether the city did not 'belong to its ruler' (τοῦ κρατοῦντος ἡ πόλις, 738). The discourse, then, shows that for Creon justice is what he, as the king, decides is right. In the end, a

king's conduct at the end of the previous episode encourages this reading: when he threatened to kill Antigone in front of his son, this no longer represented the *just* punishment of a law-breaker but an attempt to prove his absolute power and force his son to obedience.

There are also dialogic overtones with Antigone's argumentation in her *rhēsis* to the king: she declared that she buried Polynices because the 'Justice of the gods below' (τῶν κάτω θεῶν Δίκη, 451) was superior to Creon's proclamations (κηρύγμαθ', 454).⁴² In that scene, too, the king's response went beyond what he had the *right* to do as a ruler: he not only condemned Antigone to death but also Ismene against whom he had no evidence. The discourse in the antistrophe, then, supports the stance taken by Haemon and his bride: there is a change of voice, from one sympathetic to Creon, to another aligned with the betrothed couple, effectively the pro-Antigone voice.

This voice, too, emphasise the power of sexual passion: 'victory goes to the visible desire that comes from the eyes of the beautiful bride' (νικᾷ δ' ἐναργῆς βλεφάρων / ἥμερος εὐλέκτρον / νύμφας, 795-7). Like the pro-Creon voice, then, they insist that the quarrel was about love. Nonetheless, their conclusion is different: they warn that sexual desire (ἥμερος, 796) is 'the fellow-councillor in the offices of the great laws' (τῶν μεγάλων πάρεδρος ἐν ἀρχαῖς / θεσμῶν, 797-9): Eros, they imply, has a claim that is as valid as the city's 'laws' (θεσμῶν, 798). Moreover, they conclude that Aphrodite 'is irresistible in her sporting' (ἄμαχος γὰρ ἐμ/παίζει θεὸς Ἀφροδίτα, 799-800). The pro-Antigone voice, then, warn

spectator's mindset may play a role in their interpretation of the action. Cf. Pelling, 2000, pp. 199-200, on Euripides' *Medea*.

⁴² The discourse, of course, raises questions about Antigone's conception of justice, too: in the prologue, Ismene asserted that burying Polynices is not only an act 'forbidden to the city' (ἀπόρητον πόλει, 44), but one which is 'against the will of the citizens' (βία πολιτῶν, 78-9). Ismene, therefore, decides to 'obey those in authority' (τοῖς ἐν τέλει βεβῶσι πείσομαι, 67). Although she concedes that she has a duty towards the dead (64-5), she does not believe this to take precedence over the need to accept Creon's edict. Again, we see Sophocles' subtle handling of the ethical and political issues of the play.

that, by setting himself up against the power of the two invincible divinities, Eros and Aphrodite, the king is playing a dangerous game: his mind has indeed been wrenched aside from justice (701-2) and this has led ‘to ruin’ (ἐπὶ λῶβᾱ, 702) by irretrievably damaging the relationship between father and son.⁴³

There is something odd, however, about making love the root cause of the clash between Creon and his son because it does not accord with Haemon’s argumentation. This prompts the question whether the Elders’ interpretation is truly authoritative. I would argue that it is not.

First, throughout most of the ode, the *choreutai* sing about Eros in the second person (‘you fall’, πίπτεις, 782; ‘you spend the night’, ἐννυχεύεις, 784; ‘you travel’, φοιτᾷς, 785; ‘no one can escape you’, σ’, 787; σέ, 789). The direct form of this appeal indicates that they are functioning as an intra-diegetic voice. In the antistrophe, the second person verbs are even accompanied by emphatic pronouns, and the word order, too, draws attention to the deep impression the quarrel has made on the Elders as a stage figure: ‘it is you [...] who wrenches aside’ (σὺ [...] παρασπᾷς, 791-2), ‘it is you [...] who has stirred up’ (σὺ [...] ἔχεις ταραξᾷς, 793-4). The *choreutai* are not singing *qua* chorus: the discourse is in the mimetic mode, and this reduces the authoritativeness of the Elders’ interpretation of the causes behind the quarrel.

The first sentence of the antistrophe, however, sounds different. When the *choreutai* comment that that ‘you [Eros] wrench the minds even of the just aside from justice, to ruin’ (σὺ καὶ δικαίων ἀδίκους / φρένας παρασπᾷς ἐπὶ λῶβᾱ, 701-2), there are potentially two lines of

⁴³ Some critics (e.g. von Fritz, p. 4; Kitto, 1956, p. 164; Winnington-Ingram, 1980, p. 97) believe that the emphasis on the power of love indirectly foreshadows Haemon’s suicide when he finds that Antigone has hanged herself. This may be true but spectators are unlikely to realise it at this stage of the action since the manner of the young man’s death was probably a Sophoclean innovation: as the scholiast on Euripides *Phoenician Women*, 1760, explains, in the *Oedipodea* he did not kill himself but was the victim of the Sphinx (cf. Cairns, 2016, p. 10).

communication here: as we have just seen, the comment on the transgression against justice looks back to the earlier scene and the damage done to Creon's relationship with his son. The last element in the utterance, however, 'to ruin' (ἐπὶ λῶβᾱ, 702), also sounds like a prediction of the future. We saw that the first and second *stasimon* ended by foreshadowing the action to come. In the third *stasimon*, too, the extra-diegetic voice intrudes into the discourse with a proleptic pronouncement: there are further disasters to come for the king. The second line of communication is authoritative, after all.

To conclude, then: in the third *stasimon* we can again discern two voices illuminating the action from different points of view. The pro-Creon voice reiterate the tenor of the king's argument: Haemon disagreed with his father's decision because of his sexual desire for his bride. They, therefore, implicitly agree with the king. The pro-Antigone voice, on the other hand, allude to Antigone's and Haemon's concern with justice and thus problematise the king's view. Both voices, however, concur that the quarrel demonstrates the power of Love.

The young man, however, rejected any personal motivation in his speech, and this raises questions about the authoritativeness of the choral discourse. The repeated and emphasised second person pronouns suggest that the communication takes place on the primary level: the Elders operate as an intra-diegetic voice whose evaluation of the action is not authoritative.

At the same time, however, the proleptic quality of the antistrophe suggests the intrusion of the extra-diegetic voice: it signals that it is Creon who is transgressing against justice and, as in the first and the second *stasimon*, it foreshadows the ruin of the king's life at the end of the tragedy.

5. THE FIRST *KOMMOS* (806-883)

The *kommos*⁴⁴ flows on seamlessly from the third *stasimon* and consists of two strophic pairs (B, C) and an epode. Each of Antigone's sung stanzas is followed by a short choral comment, first in anapaests, perhaps again chanted by the *coryphaeus* alone, then (from 853, strophe C) in lyric iambics, performed by the whole group. The young woman laments her fate: she will go to her death unmarried (strophe B), encased in rock like Niobe (antistrophe B), mocked by the chorus (strophe C), a victim of the curse on the Labdacids (antistrophe C), unwept, friendless, and unwedded (epode).

The chorus's response has puzzled many critics since it is not always consistent with earlier comments and often combines praise and criticism in the same utterance. In my view, this again reflects the presence of the two voices: the chorus are at a complete loss and do not know how to respond to the heroine's imminent death. Let me show this in more detail.

As Antigone is led out of the palace, the *coryphaeus* admits that he is carried 'outside the laws' (θεσμῶν / ἔξω, 801-2) since he can no longer hold back his 'streams of tears' (πηγὰς [...] δάκρυ, 803). This reaction is unexpected: he has so far always been critical of Antigone, accusing her of 'being disobedient to the king's laws' (ἀπιστοῦσαν / τοῖς βασιλείοισιν [...] νόμοις, 381-2), of acting 'in folly' (ἐν ἀφροσύνῃ, 382), and of possessing 'a fierce nature' (γέννημ' ὤμόν, 471). This apparent inconsistency, however, disappears if we accept that the utterance is made by the pro-Antigone voice.

In her reply (strophe B), the young woman laments that she will go to Hades whilst still alive (ζῶσαν, 811). The *coryphaeus* tries to comfort

⁴⁴ In chapter 12 of *Poetics*, Aristotle defines a *kommos* as 'a dirge between chorus and actors' (θρῆνος κοινὸς χοροῦ καὶ ἀπὸ σκηνῆς, 1452b24-5). The formal aspects of such antiphonal lament can already be seen in Homer, in the Trojan women's lament for the dead Hector (*Il.* 24.719-76).

her, chanting that her unique (μόνη, 'you alone', 821) form of dying, going to her death while still alive, will make her 'famous' (κλεινή, 817) and bring her 'praise' (ἔπαινον, 817).⁴⁵ The utterance echoes Antigone's own and Haemon's argumentation: in her confrontation with Creon, the young woman claimed that nothing could have brought her 'more *famous fame*' (κλέος [...] εὐκλεέστερον, 502) than burying her brother. Similarly, Haemon reported that the city laments Antigone's condemnation to death 'for her most *famous* actions' (ἀπ' ἔργων εὐκλεεστάτων, 695). We continue to hear the pro-Antigone voice.

At the end of the utterance, however, the pro-Creon voice intervenes, calling her behaviour αὐτόνομος (821). Lloyd-Jones translates this adjective as 'by your own will'. Its literal meaning, however, is 'by your own law': Antigone, this voice claim, is put to death because she has acted according to a law she has made for herself, a law which transgressed that of the supreme authority of the city: the king's.⁴⁶ So far in the play, the two choral voices have been heard in separate stanzas in the choral odes. Now, they oppose each other in the same utterance, reflecting the complete fracturing of the choral voice.

In antistrophe B, Antigone compares her fate to that of the daughter of Tantalus (825). In myth, Niobe boasted of having more children than Leto. This so angered the mother of Apollo and Artemis that she had the divine twins kill all of Niobe's offspring.⁴⁷ When she was unable to overcome her grief, the gods transformed Niobe into a rock on Mount

⁴⁵ As Cairns, 2016, says, the young woman's 'lyrics take the place of the lament that would normally accompany the deceased's passage from life to death' (p. 21). Antigone, then, in effect, sings her own dirge. Moreover, even the attempts at consolation uttered by the pro-Antigone voice, in fact, bring her no comfort. This subversion of the function of the *kommos* raises questions about the response of the chorus as a whole and subtly prepares for the ambiguities in the choral comment at the very end of the play.

⁴⁶ For a discussion of how the two protagonists have different conceptions of νόμος (as well as of σέβειν, κέρδος and φίλος), see especially Dalfen, 1977, and Hester, 1980a.

⁴⁷ See *Iliad*, 24.602-17 for Achilles' use of the *comparandum* of Niobe. As we shall see in chapter 4, Sophocles' *Electra* also compares herself to Niobe (150-52). Sophocles, as well as Aeschylus, wrote tragedies about Niobe of which, however, only fragments survive.

Sipylos from which her tears flow constantly. Antigone sings that she shares not only the manner of death with this mythical figure, her encasement in a rock (827), but also her ever-weeping eyes (828-32) and the intervention of a god (832-3).

The chorus's response (834-8) again combines the two voices: the pro-Creon voice dismiss the young woman's paradigm on the grounds that Niobe, daughter of Zeus' son Tantalus, was of divine descent while Antigone is mortal. The particle *καίτοι* ('and yet', 836) in the next sentence, however, suggests that there is a change of voice. The pro-Antigone voice take over, chanting that it will be said of the young woman that she shared a fate with those 'equal to the gods' (*τοῖς ἰσοθέοις*, 837), 'both in life and later in death' (*ζῶσαν καὶ ἔπειτα θανοῦσαν*, 838): they not only concede that, in death, Antigone is similar to Niobe; they also liken her action in life to that of a god-like figure.

Faced with this contradictory assessment, Antigone feels mocked (*γελῶμαι*, 838) and insulted (*με [...] ὑβρίζεις*, 839-40) and, in strophe C, turns away from the chorus altogether: in her total isolation, she addresses the city's natural surroundings,⁴⁸ asking them 'by what laws' (*οἷοις νόμοις*, 847) she is condemned to an existence 'neither with the living nor with the dead' (*οὐ ζῶσιν, οὐ θανοῦσιν*, 852).

The chorus now erupt into emotional lyric but, again, the two voices cannot agree. The pro-Creon voice admonish Antigone for 'having advanced to the extreme of *recklessness*' (*προβᾶσ' ἐπ' ἔσχατον θράσους*, 853), and of 'having stumbled against the lofty altar of *Justice*' (*ὑψηλὸν ἐς Δίκας βάθρον / προσέπεσες*, 354). This echoes the king's assessment of the young woman's action: she '*dared*' (*ἐτόλμας*, 449) to transgress his 'laws' (*νόμους*, 449) whereas he, as we saw, expects his subjects to keep their 'neck under the yoke, as *justice* demands' (*ὑπὸ ζυγῶ / λόφον*

⁴⁸ As we saw in chapter 2, in the *Philoctetes* (936-9, 986-8), Sophocles similarly has the hero apostrophise the natural landscape when his isolation is complete. See also *Ajax*, 859-63.

δουαίως εἶχον, 291-2). The pro-Antigone voice, however, soften this condemnation, conceding that the young woman is also ‘paying for some paternal crime’ (πατρῶν δ’ ἐκτίνεις τιν’ ἄθλον, 856).

Antigone replies that she, too, sees herself as ‘accursed’ (ἀραῖος, 867) on account of ‘the fate of my father [...] and of all of us, the famous Labdacids’ (πατρὸς [...] τοῦ τε πρόπαντος / ἀμετέρου πότμου / κλεινοῖς Λαβδακίδαισιν, 859-2) and that, ultimately, her brother’s ‘disastrous marriage’ (δυσπότμων [...] γάμων, 869-70) has destroyed her.⁴⁹ The choral comment is again divided: the pro-Antigone voice admit that the ‘reverence’ (σέβειν, 872) she has shown for her brother is ‘a kind of noble reverence’ (εὐσέβειά τις, 872). The pro-Creon voice, however, disagree, singing that ‘power in the hands of him in whom power is invested must in no way be transgressed’ (κράτος δ’ ὅτῳ κράτος μέλει / παραβατὸν οὐδαμᾶ πέλει, 873-4). For them, it is Antigone’s ‘self-willed passion’ (αὐτόγνωτος [...] ὀργά, 875) that is responsible for her death. The choral voice are totally divided and, faced with another confusing comment, the young woman can only reiterate that she will be led to her death ‘unwept, friendless, unwedded’ (ἄκλαυτος, ἄφιλος, ἀνυμέναιος, 876).

Antigone’s final exit is preceded by a last confrontation with Creon: now in iambic trimeters, she reaffirms that she acted correctly when she ‘honoured’ her brother (ἐγὼ τίμησα, 904). Although there is a fleeting moment in which she admits that she acted ‘in defiance of the citizen’ (βία πολιτῶν, 907),⁵⁰ she again appeals to the ‘justice of the gods’ (δαιμόνων

⁴⁹ In myth Polynices married the daughter of the Argive king Adrastus who supported his disastrous expedition to Thebes. See Euripides *Suppliant Women* (12-16).

⁵⁰ Some editors delete 904-15, even 904-20, as an interpolation because of the illogicality of Antigone’s argument: when she says that she would not have acted as she did for a husband or child but only for a brother, she is, they argue, denying the universal validity of the ‘unwritten and unfailing ordinances of the gods’ (454-5). Knox (1964) believes that Antigone’s doubts go further. Her questions — ‘Why must I still look to the gods, unhappy one? Whom can I call on as an ally (τί χρή με τὴν δύστηνον ἐς θεοὺς ἔτι / βλέπειν; τίς’ αὐδᾶν ξυμμάχων; 922-3)? — show that she feels abandoned by the gods altogether because she ‘is given no sign of approval or support’ (p. 106). In my view,

δύκην, 921), maintaining that ‘by acting piously I have obtained [the repute of] impiety’ (τὴν δυσσέβειαν εὐσεβοῦς’ ἐκτησάμην, 924). She ends her speech with the wish that not only Creon but also the Elders learn that it is ‘they who are doing wrong’ (οἶδ’ ἀμαρτάνουσι, 927) and that ‘they may suffer’ (πάθοιεν, 928) something similar to what they have ‘unjustly’ (ἐκδίκως, 927) inflicted on her. Only the pro-Creon voice respond, chanting that ‘the same blasts of the same winds of the spirit’ (ἔτι τῶν αὐτῶν ἀνέμων αὐταὶ / ψυχῆς ῥίπαι, 929-30) still possess Antigone; confronted with the king, the pro-Antigone voice remain silent. After her final assertion that she has shown ‘reverence for noble reverence’ (τὴν εὐσεβίαν σεβίσασα, 943), the young woman is led away to be entombed alive.

To sum up: as Antigone laments her terrible fate, the response of the chorus is one of utter perplexity: critical and compassionate utterances are in conflict with each other, often in the same response. While, in the *parodos* and the first *stasimon*, the two voices were blended to suggest the harmony of the chorus, here, the combination of the two voices in the same utterance signals that, faced with the consequences of Creon’s decision and the imminent death of the protagonist, the choral voice is falling apart.

6. THE FOURTH STASIMON (944-87)

The fourth *stasimon* consists of two strophic pairs in which the *choreutai* try to make sense of Antigone’s immurement by adducing the myths of Danae, Lycurgus, and of the children of Phineus and their mother Cleopatra. Critics have struggled with the interpretation of this ode:

however, Antigone’s wish that the wrongdoers (‘these men that are in error’, οἶδ’ ἀμαρτάνουσι, 927) be punished shows that she *does* expect the gods to vindicate her, even though after her immurement. Cf. Cairns, 2014, p. 21.

Bowra (1944) writes that it 'is mysterious and comes to no definite conclusion. It seems to indicate the doubts which [the *choreutai*] feel, their inability to come to a decision' (pp. 104-5); Griffith (1999) comments that 'the allusive, convoluted lyric style highlights certain aspects of each narrative, while much of the rest of the story [...] goes unsaid' (p. 283). A number of critics even maintain that this ode has no connection with the action at all.⁵¹ This difficulty is partly due to the fact that most scholars try to find parallels between all the myths and *Antigone*. In my view, however, there are again two voices: in strophe A, the *choreutai* try to find a *comparandum* appropriate to *Antigone's* situation; in the two central stanzas, the myths adduced are relevant to the king; finally, in antistrophe B, the fate of the mythic figure is again similar to that of the protagonist. Moreover, we are beginning to perceive the change in the attitude of the voice which I have been calling 'pro-Creon': now that *Antigone* has really been led to her tomb, condemned by the king, they are beginning to turn against him. Let me show this.

In strophe A, the *choreutai* sing about Danae. In myth, this young woman was the daughter of king Acrisius of Argos.⁵² When she was born, her father travelled to Delphi to find out about having a son. Instead, he was told that Danae would bear a son who would cause his death. Trying to avoid this destiny, Acrisius shut his daughter away in an underground chamber of bronze but Zeus entered in a shower of gold and impregnated her.⁵³ Although the king put the mother and her new baby in a chest and threw them into the sea,⁵⁴ the two survived and, many years later, the

⁵¹ Cf. In his rejection of Bowra's reading of the fourth *stasimon*, Waldock, 1966, comments: 'the assumption that every ode must be relevant – must bear deeply and truly on the issues – is simply not borne out by the facts: Greek drama is packed with odes that do not possess this close relevance' (p. 118). In *Poetics* Aristotle calls such odes *embolima* (ἐμβόλιμα, ch. 19, 1456a30).

⁵² For the myth, see Apollodorus, *Ap.* 4.4, and Gantz, 1993, pp. 300-3 and pp. 310-11.

⁵³ Cf. Pindar, *Pythian* 12.17-18.

⁵⁴ Cf. Simonides, 543 PMG, and Pindar, *Nemean* 10.11.

young man accidentally killed his grandfather in an athletic contest. Despite all his endeavours, then, Acrisius was unable to escape his fate.

In the fourth *stasimon*, the *choreutai* sing about Danae, and the parallel is clearly with Antigone: they address her directly (ὦ παῖ παῖ, 'o child, child', 948) and sing that Danae 'also suffered' (ἔτλα καί, 944), 'locked away' (κατεζεύχθη, 946) in a 'sepulchral chamber' (ἐν τυμβήρῃ θαλάμῳ, 947). Although they admit that Danae is not an exact equivalent since she came from 'an honoured house' (γενεᾷ τίμιος, 948) and 'had the keeping of the seed of Zeus that flowed in gold' (Ζηνὸς ταμιεύεσκε γονὰς χρυσορύτους, 950), her life nonetheless shows that 'the power of fate is formidable' (ἄ μοιριδία τις δύνασις δεινά, 951) and that 'nothing [...] can escape it' (οὔτ' ἄν νιν [...] ἐκφύγοιεν, 954). For the voice focusing on Antigone, then, undeserved entombment and the might of destiny are what links Danae and the young woman.

In the antistrophe, the *choreutai* sing about the son of Dryas, king of the Edonians.⁵⁵ In myth, this Lycurgus attacked the nurses of Dionysus and was punished either by being blinded (*Il.* 6.130-40), or by being driven mad or made drunk. In this state he committed terrible acts of violence against his family, including killing his son.⁵⁶ Initially, in the fourth *stasimon*, the parallels between the mythical figures and Antigone seem to continue: we hear that Lycurgus is 'looked up' (ζεύχθη, 955) in a 'rocky prison' (πετρῳῶδει [...] ἐν δεσμῷ, 958), and this obviously makes him similar to Antigone. Moreover, his confinement is a punishment because, 'quickly angered' (ὀξύχολος, 955), he opposed Dionysus with 'sneering wrath' (κερτομίῳις ὀργαῖς, 956-7) and a 'mocking tongue' (κερτομίῳις γλώσσαις, 961). This could also be said of Antigone: we saw how she scoffed at Creon, indirectly calling him a 'fool' (469-70) when she defended her burial of Polynices. In addition, the *coryphaeus* has twice

⁵⁵ For a detailed description of this myth, see again Gantz, 1993, pp. 313-14.

⁵⁶ Cf. Apollodorus *ApB* 3.5.1; Hyginus *Fab* 132, 242, cf. West, 1983, pp. 63-71

drawn attention to her 'fierce temper (471-2, 929-30). Lycurgus, then, may be similar to Antigone.

As Bowra (1944) points out, however, the episode just gone has shown a 'change in Antigone, the disappearance of her last vestiges of pride' (p. 104). The *comparandum*, therefore, no longer chimes with her most recent behaviour. Secondly, it is about a *male* figure: Lycurgus. In the second *stasimon*, we saw how the change of gender marked the switch to a different voice. The same is true here: we now hear the voice trying to find a mythical parallel with Creon's attitude and behaviour.⁵⁷ First, in scene after scene we have witnessed Creon's bouts of fury: towards the guard and the chorus-leader (278-9), towards Antigone and Ismene (531-5, 561-81) and, most recently, towards Haemon (743-61). Secondly, we have just heard his mocking treatment of the distressed Antigone: he interrupted her lament with the words 'no one would cease to pour forth songs and lamentations before dying, if need be' (ἀοιδὰς καὶ γόους πρὸ τοῦ θανεῖν / ὥς οὐδ' ἄν εἰς παύσαιτ' ἄν, εἰ χρεῖη λέγειν, 883-4). He then ordered his attendants to take her away, deriding her by saying that her choice was between 'dying' (θανεῖν, 887) and 'being entombed alive' (ζῶσα τυμβεύειν, 888). Moreover, he claimed that he and his men were 'guiltless' (ἄγνοι, 'holy', 'pure from blood', 889). Finally, the *choreutai* sing about the 'formidable force of [Lycurgus's] madness (τᾶς μανίας δεινὸν [...] μένος, 959-60) and that it was 'with madness' (μανίαις, 960) that he laid his hands on Dionysus. This, too, evokes the episode just gone: at the end of their quarrel, after Creon threatened to have Antigone executed on the spot, Haemon stormed out telling him that he might continue to 'act like a madman' (μαίνῃ, 765).⁵⁸ In the *antistrophe*, then, the conduct of the

⁵⁷ Cf. Errandonea (1953b, p. 20-3) and Winnington-Ingram (1980, pp. 102-4). Despite his comment about the change in Antigone, Bowra, however, believes that the Lycurgus paradigm is about Antigone showing that 'perhaps she deserved what she gets' (p. 105).

⁵⁸ It is, of course, also true that Antigone has been accused of acting 'without sense'; in the prologue by Ismene (ἄνους, 99) and, in the second *stasimon*, by the chorus (λόγου [...])

mythological figure is similar to that of the king. Strikingly, however, there is a shift in the attitude of the pro-Creon voice: while they previously sympathised with his decisions, their discourse now implies criticism.

The third tale, about the sons of Phineus and their mother, takes up two stanzas:⁵⁹ in strophe B the *choreutai* sing about the blinding of the two children while, in antistrophe B, they focus on Cleopatra. In myth, the Thracian king Phineus lived in Salmydessus, not far from the entrance to the Bosphorus. He married Cleopatra, and the couple had two children. Later, however, Phineus divorced her and married another woman. His new wife put out the eyes of his sons by the first marriage or, falsely accusing them of having attempted to seduce her, had their father blind them.

In our *stasimon*, strophe B and the first two lines of the antistrophe are about the children of Phineus: the *choreutai* describe in graphic detail how they are blinded (971-6) and how misery follows (978-9). In the rest of the antistrophe, the story moves to their mother, focusing on her childhood (981-7). Some critics believe that, since the *choreutai* address Antigone at the end of the ode (ὦ παῖ, ‘my child’, 986), the whole myth serves as a paradigm for her fate.⁶⁰ In my view, however, there is a change of voice: the treatment of the children represents a parallel with Creon; that of Cleopatra evokes Antigone.

In the strophe, we hear about the wounding of the sons as observed by Ares. For Jebb (1900) ‘the god of cruel bloodshed beholds *with joy* a deed so worthy of his Thracian realm’ (p. 173, my italics). There is,

ἄνοια, ‘senselessness/folly in speech’, 603). The mention of a god in the fourth *stasimon*, however, makes it less likely that *mania* is a reference to her since she has specifically claimed to be acting in the service of the ‘unwritten and unfailing ordinances of the gods’ (ἄγραπτα κάσφαλῇ θεῶν / νόμιμα, 454-5). She is more likely, then, to be one of the ‘god-inspired women’ (ἐνθέους γυναῖκας, 963-4) whom Lycurgus tries to stop. See Winnington-Ingram, 1980, p. 104; Sourvinou-Inwood, 1989, p. 152; Cullyer, 2005, p. 17; and Cairns, 2016, p. 33.

⁵⁹ For the myth, see Apollodorus, *ApB* 3.15.2, and Gantz, 1993, pp. 349-52.

⁶⁰ Cf. Jebb, 1900, p. 173.

however, no hint of joy in the description. On the contrary, the injury is called an ‘accursed blinding wound’ (ἄρατὸν ἔλκος / [...] ἀλαόν, 972-3), the eyes of the children ‘orbs crying for vengeance’ (ἀλαστόροισιν [...] κύκλοις, 974), the stepmother the ‘savage wife’ (ἀγρίας δάμαρτος), and her hands ‘bloodstained’ (αἱματηραῖς, 975).⁶¹ The focalisation through Ares who here does *not* revel in the bloodshed makes the action even more appalling.

At the start of the antistrophe, we learn how the two children ‘pine away’ (τακόμενοι, 978), ‘miserably lamenting their miserable suffering’ (μέλαιοι μελέαν πάθαν / κλαῖον, 97-80). In myth, as we saw, this suffering was caused by their stepmother, a relative by marriage. In our play, there are also two siblings whose lives are being destroyed: Antigone and Ismene. Here, too, the person responsible is a relation by marriage: Creon.⁶² Both facts were earlier emphasised: when the king condemned his two nieces to death (488), he said that he was doing so although they ‘share the blood of my sister’ (ἀδελφῆς [...] ὁμαιμονεστέρα, 486, cf. 658-9). Secondly, although Ismene has been pardoned, she earlier confessed to Antigone that, with her sister gone, she had no ‘desire for life’ (βίου [...] πόθος, 548).⁶³ Finally, the blinding of the sons of Phineus is called an act ‘demanding vengeance’ (ἀλαστόροισιν, 974). This evokes Antigone’s wish at the end of the *kommos* that Creon be punished (927-8).⁶⁴ In this part of the *Cleopatra exemplum*, then, the reference is to the king. Again, however,

⁶¹ Sourvinou-Inwood, 1989b, p. 157, notes that there is a version in which Cleopatra herself, Medea-like, blinds her children (Schol. S. *Ant.* 981). She believes this to be the myth the fourth *stasimon* refers to since, for her, Antigone fits the type of ‘wild woman out of control’ (p. 158). In my view, this is an unlikely reading: the children are maimed by Phineus’ ‘cruel wife’ (ἐξ ἀγρίας δάμαρτος, 973) and, after Phineus’ divorce from Cleopatra, δάμαρ (wife, spouse) is more likely to refer to the king’s *new* wife, the children’s stepmother.

⁶² There could also be a further, proleptic, reference to Creon’s conduct towards his own children, Haemon and Megareus (1303).

⁶³ This is Lloyd-Jones’ text. Other manuscripts have βίος [...] φίλος, i.e. Ismene’s ‘life’ will no longer be ‘dear’ to her without her sister. This, however, does not affect my interpretation.

⁶⁴ Cf. Cullyer, 2005, p. 8.

it is striking that the voice that earlier examined the action from his point of view no longer support him but implicitly condemn him for the pain he has brought on his two nieces.

The third line of the antistrophe starts with an emphatic shift to a female figure (ἀ δέ, 'but she'), and the *choreutai* now focus on Cleopatra. This marks another change, back to the pro-Antigone voice, trying to find a mythical parallel with the young woman's destiny. The main points of comparison are their descent, their upbringing, and the terrible fate they suffered in later life. First, both are princesses of an indigenous royal family, Cleopatra 'of the ancient house of Erechtheus' (ἀρχαιογόνων / Ἐρεχθειδᾶν, 981-2), that is, the Athenian royal family, Antigone, as we saw in the second *stasimon*, of the Labdacids, the autochthonous Theban house of Cadmus. Secondly, both enjoyed a relatively unrestricted childhood: Cleopatra, the *choreutai* sing, was raised 'in distant caves among her father's storm winds' (τηλεπόροις δ' ἐν ἄντροις / [...] θυέλλαισιν ἐν πατρώαις, 983-4) and roamed about freely 'swift as a horse beyond the steep mountain' (ἄμιππος ὀρθόποδος ὑπὲρ πάγου, 985). Antigone and Ismene, too, were allowed some freedom. It is only after Polynices' burial that Creon orders that from now on 'they must be women, and must not be on the loose' (ἐκ δὲ τοῦδε χορὴ / γυναικας εἶναι τάσδε μηδ' ἀνειμένας, 578-9). Cleopatra and Antigone, then, are similar in this respect, too. Finally, directly addressing Antigone, the *choreutai* conclude that 'even upon [Cleopatra] the long-lived Fates bore hard, my child' (ἀλλὰ καπ' ἐκείνα / Μοῖραι μακροίωνες ἔσχον, ὦ παῖ, 986-7): the general destiny of the two women is comparable, too.

Let me conclude my discussion of the fourth *stasimon* by briefly looking at two intrusions of the extra-diegetic voice. The first concerns Creon. As we have repeatedly seen, the choral odes tend to contain a proleptic utterance which hints at the action to follow. This is true for this ode, too: just as Lycurgus' madness 'trickles away' (ἀποστᾶζει, 959), so

the king's confidence will collapse after Tiresias' prophecy. The *choreutai* no longer simply perform as Elders of Thebes; it is the ultimate authority of the tragedy that speaks through them, preparing the ground for the king's punishment.

The second intrusion affects Antigone: here, the extra-diegetic voice uses the Cleopatra *comparandum* to suggest that the protagonist's conduct has been transgressive. As we saw, Cleopatra was brought up away from civilisation and was in the habit of wandering about the mountains. This hints at some wildness.⁶⁵ The prologue similarly portrayed Antigone as transgressive: she asked Ismene to come 'outside the gates of the courtyard' (ἐκτὸς αὐλείων πυλῶν, 18) because she had a secret to tell her, something she wanted 'you alone to hear' (ὥς μόνῃ κλύοις, 19). Roaming around freely, then, is not the norm for young women. We have witnessed further traits of Antigone's wildness in the course of the play, not only in her confrontation with Creon but also with Ismene. Overall, then, the discourse of the fourth *stasimon* suggests that, while Creon's treatment of his niece is to be condemned, Antigone ultimately also bears some responsibility for her fate.

7. THE FIFTH STASIMON (1115-52)

The fifth *stasimon* again consists of two strophic pairs and is performed after Tiresias' intervention, the turning point of the play. The prophet tells the king that 'the city is diseased because of your mind' (τῆς σῆς ἐκ φρενὸς νοσεῖ πόλις, 1015), and that, because the gods are angered, they 'no longer accept prayers' (οὐ δέχονται [...] λιτάς ἔτι, 1020). Like Haemon (710ff), he warns Creon against inflexibility and recommends that he learn from good advice. Instead of listening, however, Creon again loses his temper and falsely accuses the seer of the same offence as the guard, of

⁶⁵ As we saw (n. 59), I disagree with Sourvinou-Inwood's overall interpretation of this ode. I do, however, think that her comment on the wild upbringing of Cleopatra is valid.

speaking 'for the sake of profit' (κέρδους χάριν, 1047, cf. 1037). Insulted, Tiresias leaves after prophesying Haemon's death as a punishment for his father's 'blasphemously lodging a living person in a tomb' (ψυχὴν τ' ἀτίμως ἐν τάφῳ κατώκισας, 1069) and 'keeping here something belonging to the gods below, a corpse deprived, unburied, unholy' (ἔχεις δὲ τῶν κάτωθεν ἐνθάδ' αὖ θεῶν / ἄμοιρον, ἀκτέριστον, ἀνόσιον νέκυν, 1070-1): the exposure of Polynices' body and the immurement of Antigone are finally revealed to be sacrilegious. Tiresias' prediction shakes Creon: within twelve lines he admits to the *coryphaeus* that 'my mind is troubled' (ταράσσομαι φρένας, 1095) and asks him whether he 'should give way' (παρεικαθεῖν, 1102) and 'give up his heart's purpose' (καρδίας δ' ἐξίσταμαι, 1105). Encouraged by the chorus-leader, he rushes out, intent on burying Polynices and releasing Antigone.⁶⁶

In the fifth *stasimon* that follows, the *choreutai* appeal to Dionysus to come to Thebes.⁶⁷ As in the *parodos*, the two voices can be sensed but, since Tiresias has vindicated Antigone's burial of her brother, both now give prominence to the god: the group as a whole perform in harmony again to appeal for divine assistance.

In strophe A, the chorus address Dionysus in a song that employs many of the formal and stylistic features of a Greek hymn type, the cletic hymn, in which a deity is summoned to come and appear at a celebration in his or her honour or, as here, at times of need.⁶⁸ The *choreutai* begin by appealing to the god by the honorific title 'you of many names' (πολυώνυμε, 1115). They then describe his genealogy, calling him the 'delight of the Cadmean bride' (Καδμείας / νύμφας ἄγαλμα, 1115-6) and the 'offspring of loud-thundering Zeus' (Διὸς βαρυβρεμέτα / γένος, 1117-

⁶⁶ The *coryphaeus*, of course, advises Creon to release Antigone first and then bury Polynices. The reversal of the order will prove fatal.

⁶⁷ See Macedo, 2011, for an analysis of the 'double identity' of this ode: its cultic reality and its dramatic relevance.

⁶⁸ Cf. Furley and Bremer, 2001, vol. 1, pp. 50-64, especially p. 61.

8). Next, they refer to the places which ‘you rule over’ (ἀμφέπεις, 1118) and ‘protect’ (μέδεις, 1119), Italy and Eleusis, and the city in which he has his abode, Thebes, ‘mother city of the Bacchants’ (Βακχᾶν ματρόπολιν Θήβαν, 1122). The use of actual cultic language is a reminder of the piety of the chorus in the *parodos*.

In the antistrophe, the *choreutai* visualise the god’s gradual approach: they first imagine him at Delphi, where the Bacchic nymphs see him at a torch-festival on Mt. Parnassus (1126), by the Corycian cave (1128-8), and the Castilian spring (1130). They then envision him coming from the hills of Nysa (1131), a city probably located on the island of Euboea which lies opposite Boeotia and is, therefore, geographically close to Thebes.⁶⁹ At the end of antistrophe A, finally, they visualise the god’s actual epiphany at Thebes, marked by the shouts of ‘euhoe’ (εὐαζόντων, 1135) of his divine followers (ἀμβρότων, 1134), the maenads. Since the *coryphaeus* has just urged Creon to free Antigone and bury Polynices (1100-1) in order to prevent the seer’s prophecy from coming true, the chorus are implicitly praying for the salvation of the two young people. Their names, however, are not mentioned: the precise application is left open to suggest a more united chorus.

In strophe B, the *choreutai* again refer to Semele, now as Dionysus’ ‘thunder-smitten mother’ (ματρὶ [...] κεραυνία, 1139), and imagine the god’s arrival at Thebes, again either from Mt. Parnassus or from the

⁶⁹ Griffith (1999) writes that the name is applied to ‘more than a dozen places around the world as the home or birthplace for *Dio-nysus*’ (p. 320). In the *Homeric Hymn to Dionysus*, for instance, Nysa is in Ethiopia (1.8-9), in Homer it is in Thrace (*Il.* 6.133). Griffith situates it on Euboea because this location is also hinted at in strophe B (1145). Moreover, in the Homeric catalogue of ships, the epithet ‘rich in grapes’ (πολυστάφυλος, 1133) is applied to Histiae, a city on the island (*Il.* 2.537). Euboea is also mythically connected with the god: according to Apollonius Rhodius, the epic poet of the third century BCE, Hermes brought the ‘Nysian son of Zeus’ (Διὸς Νυσήϊον υἱά) to a sacred cave on the island after rescuing him from fire (*Argonautica*, 4.1135-7). Cullyer, 2005, on the other hand, places Nysa in Thrace, arguing that this creates a link between this *stasimon*, the second where the stormy Thracian sea is employed as a metaphor for the curse on the Labdacid house, and the fourth where both Ares and Phineus reside in Thrace.

‘groaning strait’ (στονόεντα πορθμόν, 1145), the narrow channel of the sea between Euboea and Boeotia known for its rough waters. At the centre of the stanza, the linguistic marker νῦν δ’ (‘and/but now’ or ‘as things are’, 1140) indicates a slightly different focus:⁷⁰ the *choreutai* sing that ‘the whole city is possessed by a violent sickness’ (βιαίας ἔχεται / πάνδαμος πόλις ἐπὶ νόσου, 1140-1). They, therefore, beg Dionysus to appear ‘with purifying foot’ (καθαροσίῳ ποδὶ, 1142). Tiresias earlier explained that Thebes’ altars are ‘full of the carrion brought in by birds and dogs from the unfortunate son of Oedipus’ (πλήρεις ὑπ’ οἰωνῶν τε καὶ κυνῶν βορᾶς / τοῦ δυσμόρου [...] Οἰδίπου γόνου, 1017-18): Creon is, then, responsible for the arrival of disease at Thebes.⁷¹ We sense the presence of the voice that aligned themselves with the king after Antigone’s illicit burial of Polynices. In the fourth *stasimon*, they already expressed criticism of the king’s conduct. Now, they see him as an actual threat to Thebes. The change of attitude of the pro-Creon voice is complete: they return to being the civic voice of the start of the play whose interest is in the city not the royal household.

Antistrophe B contains the most fervent appeal to Dionysus so far: the *choreutai* beg the god to appear (προφάνηθ’, ‘reveal yourself’, 1149) as a cosmic power,⁷² as the ‘fire-breathing chorus-leader of the stars’ (πῦρ πνειόντων / χοράγ’ ἄστρον, 1146-7) and ‘guardian of the voices heard by night’ (νυχίων / φθεγμάτων ἐπίσκοπε, 1147-8). They then again imagine welcoming him to Thebes, and once more visualise the presence of the maenads: the god is to come ‘with his attendant Thyiads’ (ἄμα περιπόλοις / Θυίαισιν, 1150-1) who are to dance all night (πάννυχτοι /

⁷⁰ Cf. *Phil.* 718, where the same particles marked the return to the intrigue in the *stasimon*.

⁷¹ At 2.47ff Thucydides repeatedly uses the word νόσος for the plague in Athens. Scullion, 1998, on the other hand, suggests that the word is more likely to refer to a ‘mental disturbance or madness’ (p. 114) since Tiresias specifically referred to Creon’s mind (φρενός, 1015) in connection with the disease. Scullion analyses the use of *nosos* in this sense in Sophocles’ *Philoctetes*, *Ajax*, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, and *Trachiniae* (pp. 114-16).

⁷² Cf. Scullion, 1998, p. 105 and p. 113.

χορεύουσι, 1151-2) for their ‘master Iacchus’ (τὸν ταμίαν Ἰακχον, 1152). As at the end of the *parodos* (151-4), the choral group perform in harmony, imagining celebratory dancing with Bacchus.

As in the third *stasimon*, however, the *choreutai*, are mistaken. Spectators with some theatrical experience may guess this before the actual entry of the messenger immediately after this ode, reporting the deaths of Antigone and Haemon: Sophocles was fond of such joyous odes before disaster.⁷³ Moreover, in his plays – as in Greek tragedy in general – prophecies always come true.⁷⁴ The hope of the *choreutai*, then, is likely to be misplaced.

The authoritativeness of the choral discourse is also undermined in a number of other ways. First, the mode is mimetic: the ode begins and ends with clear vocatives (‘you of many names’, πολυώνυμε, 1115; ‘oh Bacchus’, ὦ Βακχεῦ, 1121; ‘oh Lord’, ὦναξ, 1150). Moreover, there are a number of verbs in the second person (‘you rule over’, ἀμφέπεις, 1118; ‘you protect’, μέδεις, 1119; ‘you honour’, τιμᾷς, 1137). There are also second person pronouns (σέ, ‘you’ 1126, 1131, 1151) and a second person possessive adjective (σαῖς, ‘your’, 1150). Finally, the appeal concludes with imperatives (μολεῖν, ‘come!’, 1142; προφάνηθ’, ‘reveal yourself!’, 1149). The *choreutai* are performing as an intra-diegetic voice on the primary level of communication: the authoritativeness of their discourse is low.

Secondly, there is a sense that the discourse is not about salvation but about death. Throughout the ode, Dionysus is mentioned in connection with Eleusis: in strophe A, he is referred to as the god who ‘rules over the hollows of Demeter of Eleusis’ (Ἐλευσινίας / Διῶς ἐν κόλποις, 1119-20) and, at the end of antistrophe B, he is called by his

⁷³ He also employed them in the *Trachiniae* (634-62), the *Ajax* (693-719), and the *Oedipus Tyrannus* (1086-1109). See Dale, 1950, and Henrichs, 1994/95, for discussions of the so-called *hypochēme*.

⁷⁴ Cf. Calchas in the *Ajax* and the *Philoctetes*, Tiresias in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, Apollo in the *Electra*, the prediction about the end of Heracles’ suffering in the *Trachiniae*, and the death of the aged Oedipus in the *Oedipus Coloneus*.

Eleusinian cult title 'Iacchus, the dispenser' (τὸν ταμίαν Ἰακχον, 1152). At Eleusis, however, Dionysus was associated with the mysteries of Demeter and Kore (or Persephone / Persephessa), and their initiates believed in a happy life *after death*.⁷⁵ In Italy (1119), too, Dionysus was connected with the hope of an afterlife.⁷⁶ Even Antigone earlier mentioned Persephone in connection with death, saying she would soon be greeted by the deceased members of her family 'of whom Persephessa has already received a great number' (πλεῖστον δέδεκται Φερσέφασσ' ὀλωλότων, 894). The discourse with its emphasis on the afterlife, then, undermines the hope of the first line of communication.

Thirdly, in the play as a whole, Dionysus has two sides: in ritual settings, such as this *stasimon* (1147, 1151-2) and the *parodos* (153-4), the *choreutai* present him as a devoted supporter of his native city and leader of all-night ritual dancing. In the mythological setting of the fourth *stasimon*, however, he was the retaliatory god who castigated Lycurgus for mocking him. Spectators familiar with the mythological and poetic tradition may, moreover, remember another well-known Theban king, Pentheus, who also derided Dionysus and whom the god punished by making use of divinely enthused women.⁷⁷ When the Elders sing about the maenads accompanying Dionysus as 'frenzied' (μαινόμεναι, 1151), then, there is a sense that Antigone may be another such god-inspired woman, and that Creon, just like Lycurgus and Pentheus, will be punished for his disrespectful treatment of her.

Associating Antigone with frenzy, however, has another effect. Although Tiresias' revelation vindicated the young woman's burial of her

⁷⁵ cf. *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 480-2, Aristophanes *Frogs*, 371-413. For modern discussions of mystery cults, see Burkert, 1985, pp. 290-5, and Seaford, 2006, pp. 49-58.

⁷⁶ cf. Seaford, 2006, p. 51 and pp. 78-81; Furley and Bremer, 2001, pp. 275-6.

⁷⁷ Both myths were presented as tragedies in Athens, in Aeschylus' Thracian or *Lycurgus* tetralogy and, in 405 BCE, i.e. after the *Antigone*, in Euripides' *Bacchae*. In that play, too, Dionysus is presented in terms of this duality, as 'a god most terrible, but to mortals also most gentle' (θεός / δεινότατος, ἀνθρώποισι δ' ἡπιώτατος, 861).

brother, *μαινόμεναι* also functions as a reminder of her own transgressive behaviour: as Ismene pointed out in the prologue, it was not customary for a woman to fight against men (61). Moreover, she was rash when she called the new ruler of Thebes a ‘fool’ (469-70). Finally, her loyalty to the dead Polynices is unconventional (73-7)⁷⁸ and, in her last speech, she even stated that she was more devoted to him than she would have been to a husband or a son (904-12).⁷⁹ The extra-diegetic voice, then, obliquely suggests that Antigone, too, is at fault.

To sum up: following Tiresias’ revelation, the chorus sing in harmony again in the fifth *stasimon*, appealing together to Dionysus to appear in Thebes. The two voices can still be discerned, one voice hoping that the god will save Antigone and Haemon, the other that he will heal the city; they no longer, however, illuminate the action from two different standpoints.

Secondly, the shift in the attitude of the pro-Creon voice is now complete. As we saw, in the fourth *stasimon* they were simply critical of the king’s conduct towards Antigone. Now, however, they consider him to be responsible for bringing contamination to Thebes: their sympathy with him has vanished altogether and their principal concern is with the city again. They have returned to functioning as the civic voice.

Finally, the discourse signals that the Elders’ hope is misguided: in Sophocles there are other examples of joyous odes before disaster, and prophecies always come true. The mode of communication is mimetic, too, the level is primary: the vision of the Elders, then, is not authoritative.

The extra-diegetic voice does, however, intrude into the discourse, not to endorse what the *choreutai* are singing, however, but to achieve the

⁷⁸ ‘Beloved by him, I shall lie with him who is beloved by me’ (φίλη μετ’ αὐτοῦ κείσομαι, φίλου μέτα, 73-76). The line, specifically the verb *κεῖμαι* (‘lie’), has erotic overtones.

⁷⁹ See Cairns, 2016, pp. 93-113, for an analysis of the themes of love and death in the play. He, too, sees Antigone as partly responsible for her death.

opposite effect: to suggest that what will follow is not reconciliation but retaliation, and that both Creon and Antigone will be affected.

8. THE SECOND KOMMOS (1261-1346)

The second *kommos* takes place after the messenger has reported that Creon's attempts at making amends have been in vain: after burying Polynices, he hurried on to the cave, only to find that Antigone has hanged herself and that his son is in the cave, too, bewailing his bride's death. Haemon then commits suicide after attempting to kill his father 'in wrath at his murder' (μηνίσας φόνου, 1177). The *coryphaeus* now comments that Tiresias' prophecy has come true (1178). This makes it clear that the choral discourse of the fifth *stasimon* was, indeed, unreliable. Moreover, the chorus-leader misinterprets the reaction of Creon's wife Eurydice to her son's death: after hearing the messenger's report, she goes back into the house without uttering word. The *coryphaeus* simply comments that 'to me both excessive silence and loud crying to no end seem grievous' (ἐμοὶ δ' οὖν ἢ τ' ἄγαν σιγή βαρὺ / δοκεῖ προσεῖναι χημάτην πολλή βοή, 1251-2). After the queen's suicide, this, too, will retrospectively show his lack of insight.

The *kommos* that follows, between the chorus and the king, mirrors the earlier *kommos* between the chorus and Antigone at end of the first part of the play. Both laments consist of two strophic pairs, and the stage figure sings predominantly in lyric while the chorus perform mainly in a non-lyric metre. There is, however, a marked difference: as we saw, in the first *kommos*, the choral response was divided between compassion and censure; now, however, the Elders univocally condemn the king. Moreover, the contrast between Creon's contrition, expressed in sung dochmiacs, a metre reserved for the most emotional tragic scenes, and the total lack of regret on the part of the *coryphaeus*, uttered in spoken trimeters, is striking and raises questions about the conduct of the group.

When the *coryphaeus* first sees Creon with the corpse of his son, he immediately, though cautiously, blames the king for the calamity: ‘if it is right to say so, his ruin came not from others but because he himself erred’ (εἰ θέμις εἰπεῖν,⁸⁰ οὐκ ἀλλοτρίαν / ἄτην, ἀλλ’ αὐτὸς ἀμαρτών, 1259-60). His response becomes more assertive once Creon himself has admitted ‘the errors of my witless wits’ (φρενῶν δυσφρόνων ἀμαρτήματα, 1261) and conceded that his son’s death was caused by ‘my and not your [Haemon’s] folly’ (ἐμαῖς οὐδὲ σαῖς δυσβουλίαις, 1269). The chorus-leader now comments that ‘it seems that you have seen justice too late’ (οἶμ’ ὥς ἔουκας ὁψὲ τὴν δίκην ἰδεῖν, 1270). This sounds as though he has known from the start that Creon’s edict and subsequent actions violated justice. In reality, however, he tacitly accepted the new ruler’s decisions (211-14, 576), repeatedly criticised Antigone (381-2, 471-2, 929-30), and encouraged the king to see Haemon’s anger as a sign of sexual frustration (626-30, 766-8) rather than as genuine concern for his father’s offence against justice (743). Unlike the guard who stood up to the new ruler (319-23), the chorus-leader remained silent and failed to speak in Antigone’s defence. He could, therefore, be seen to be partly responsible for the desecration of Polynices’ body and Antigone’s immurement.

This lack of remorse on the part of the chorus-leader continues when the messenger reports Eurydice’s suicide and her curse on her husband, ‘the child-killer’ (τῷ παιδοκτόνῳ, 1305). Creon is clearly distraught: he not only accepts his fault (‘it was I who killed you, I, oh unfortunate one, I’, ἐγὼ [...] σ’ ἐγὼ ἔκανον, ὦ μέλεος, / ἐγὼ, 1319-20), he also recognises the bleakness of his future, now that his whole family has perished: ‘I am no more than nothing’ (ἄγετέ μ’ ἐκποδών, / τὸν οὐκ ὄντα μᾶλλον ἢ μηδένα, 1324-5), he sings, and wishes for death, ‘the best fate of

⁸⁰ As we shall see in the *Electra*, θέμις (‘law as established by custom’) implies respect for the special status of a king: this makes the chorus’s blunt comment in the *Antigone* more striking.

all' (μόρων ὁ κάλλιστ', 1329). The *coryphaeus*, instead of conceding that he misjudged Eurydice's reaction, merely retorts that 'this lies in the future; it is about the present that one should be doing something' (μέλλοντα ταῦτα. τῶν προκειμένων τι χρὴ μέλειν / πράσσειν, 1334-5). Griffith (1999) writes that 'through this bland vagueness and their brisk, flat expression, the Chorus maintain an emotional distance from the wailing figure before them and remind him (and the audience) that life must go on' (p. 353).⁸¹ This emotional distancing, however, also highlights the failure of the Elders to accept their indirect collusion with the king and thus raises questions about authoritativeness of their assessment of the events.

9. CONCLUSION AND FINAL CHORAL COMMENT (1348-53)

Before I analyse the final choral comment I would like to take stock of my findings so far. Let me start with the alignment of the chorus. The confrontation between the two protagonists is hinted at in the prologue: we learn that Antigone is distressed by Creon's decision to leave her brother's corpse exposed on the battlefield and that she plans to bury him despite the royal edict that imposes the death penalty on anyone performing such funerary rites. The alignment of the chorus will, therefore, be a point of interest.

In the *parodos*, the chorus celebrate the Theban victory of the Argive intruder together. They do, however, use lexis from two discreet semantic fields: one athletic, the other hieratic. This is the first hint that they may not respond monovocally to the action but will be divided in their sympathies for the two protagonists. In the first *stasimon*, this possible split in the choral voice is suggested, too, since the *encomium* of Man is

⁸¹ This emotional distancing is even more striking if we compare it with the second *kommos* of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* where the chorus, although horrified at Oedipus' pollution and his self-blinding, display much greater compassion for their king (especially 1297-1306).

undermined by repeated warnings of human hubris. In both odes, however, the two voices are subtly fused: unaware of the conflict to come, the chorus respond in harmony to the recent events.

As soon as the action is properly underway, the voices align themselves to one of the protagonists and separate out into different stanzas. In the first strophic pair of the second *stasimon*, the pro-Creon voice illuminate the conflict from the king's point of view: it is the young woman's aggressive defiance of authority that is responsible for the confrontation. In the second strophic pair, however, the pro-Antigone voice suggest a different view: by leaving Polynices unburied and condemning Antigone's action, Creon is challenging Zeus's authority. Moreover, he is deluded in thinking that his decisions are good when, in fact, they are bad. In the third *stasimon*, too, the voices are heard separately: in the first stanza, the pro-Creon voice echo the king's view that Haemon's insubordination is simply due to his sexual passion for his bride; in the second stanza, the pro-Antigone voice take a different view: although they, too, attribute the quarrel to the irresistible power of Eros and Aphrodite, they warn the king against acting contrary to justice and setting himself up against Love. In both *stasima*, the two voices take separate stands: the *agōn* on stage is mirrored by an *agōn* in the *orchestra*.

This sense of *aporia*, of total perplexity, is reflected in the first *kommos*. The two voices are in conflict with each other, sometimes in the same utterance, leaving Antigone confused: one voice react with compassion to the young woman's lament, the other maintain that the authority of the monarch has to be respected. The chorus are torn and do not know how to respond to Antigone's imminent death.

After the *kommos*, there is a gradual shift in the attitude of the chorus: although the two voices are initially still heard separately, both now become critical of the king. In the fourth *stasimon*, one voice use the myths of Danae and Cleopatra to suggest that the young woman's

immurement is undeserved; the other, singing about Lycurgus and the sons of Phineus, criticise Creon and suggest that his opposition to Antigone will result in his punishment. In the fifth *stasimon*, after Tiresias' prophecy, the voices pray together for Dionysus' assistance, but Creon is now presented as an actual threat to Thebes. Finally, in the second *kommos*, the change in the chorus's sympathies is complete: as Creon recognises the errors of his conduct, they univocally condemn his actions.

How does a divided chorus affect the authoritativeness of their utterances? First, by analysing the action from two separate standpoints, the chorus come to an evaluation of the action that is more complex than that arrived at by a monovocal group. This encourages the audience to engage at a deeper level with the ethical and political implications of the action, especially since the reasoning and conduct of both the king and his niece are also represented as flawed.

Secondly, the extra-diegetic voice regularly intrudes into the discourse to foreshadow Creon's eventual downfall. At the beginning, his edict is placed in the wider context of man's failing: in the first *stasimon* the extra-diegetic voice warns against human hubris, in the second against self-delusion. Once it has become apparent that the death sentence on Antigone is no longer about the just application of the law of the land, but has become the king's personal power tool, the discourse becomes more condemnatory: the third *stasimon* suggests that the king's conduct contravenes against justice, the fourth that he will be punished. All these predictions come true in the end, suggesting that the chorus's utterances are authoritative.

At the same time, however, choral judgements are shown to be unreliable. Sometimes the audience have information that tells them that the Elders' judgement is fallible. At the end of the *parodos*, for instance, the *choreutai* express the hope that they will be able to forget the civil war; the prologue, however, has prepared the audience for further repercussions.

At other times, the analysis of the Elders does not reflect what actually happened on stage: in the third *stasimon*, for example, they assert that the quarrel between Creon and his son was about sexual passion; Haemon, however, presented political arguments to show that his father's action was wrong. Finally, in the fifth *stasimon*, they sing about their hope for salvation; spectators with some theatrical experience, however, realise that death is a more likely outcome.

Finally, vertical dialogic overtones often problematise the Elders' evaluation of the action. In the *parodos*, for instance, there are echoes with Aeschylus' *Septem* that suggest that the conflict between the two brothers is more complex than the *choreutai* propose. Similarly, the first *stasimon* evokes fifth-century philosophical discussion around human progress. Here, the failure of the *choreutai* to mention the gods raises questions about their view of human development. There is, then, a tension in the choral voice between utterances that are authoritative and those that are not.

As we have just seen, the intrusion of the extra-diegetic voice focuses largely on Creon's descent into disaster, due especially to his religious and political failings: by prohibiting the burial of Polynices, he immediately sets himself up against what Antigone calls the unwritten ordinances of the gods. Soon, however, he also begins to betray the principles of rule that he described in his first speech: while presenting himself as a proto-democratic ruler, he later asserts that any difference of opinion is insubordination and quickly turns into an autocratic tyrant. His punishment is, therefore, to be expected.

The choral discourse, however, suggests that Antigone is also at fault: words indicating lack of sense (*anoia*), mental aberration (*atē*), even madness (*mania*), are used not only in connection with Creon but also with the young woman. The conduct of both protagonists, then, is presented as problematic.

With this in mind, let me now turn to the final choral comment. The Elders start by chanting that ‘good sense’ (τὸ φρονεῖν, 1347) is the first principle of ‘happiness’ (εὐδαιμονίας, 1347). This is certainly true: both protagonists have been wrong in their judgements, and the outcome is a mirror-image of misery: Antigone has gone to her tomb while still alive (852); Creon’s existence will be that of a ‘living corpse’ (ἔμψυχον [...] νεκρόν, 1167).

Secondly, the *choreutai* state that ‘one should never be irreverent towards the gods’ (χρὴ δὲ τὰ γ’ εἰς θεοὺς / μηδὲν ἀσεπτεῖν, 1348-9). This conclusion is also correct: the disaster that has struck Creon and his family ultimately vindicates Antigone’s burial of Polynices. Her repeated claims to piety (924, 943) have retrospectively been proven to be correct and her wish that the king, too, may suffer (926) has also come true: the gods seem, then, to approve of her burial of Polynices.

The chorus’s final conclusion, however, is more ambiguous: they end with a *gnōmē* which states that ‘boasters are taught good sense in old age because they pay the price for their big words with big blows’ (μεγάλοι δὲ λόγοι / μεγάλας πληγὰς τῶν ὑπεραύχων / ἀποτίσαντες / γήρα τὸ φρονεῖν ἐδίδαξαν, 1349-53). Initially, this sounds like a reference to Creon: the king’s principles of rule have been shown to be nothing but ‘big words’; the action that followed revealed him as a despot. Moreover, he boasted that he would never bury Polynices ‘not even if Zeus’ eagles are ready to snatch him and carry him up as food to their master’s throne’ (οὐδ’ εἰ θέλουσ’ οἱ Ζηνὸς αἰετοὶ βορὰν / φέρειν νιν ἀρπάζοντες ἐς Διὸς θρόνους, 1040-1). In the event, however, he relented, falsely hoping that this would stop Tiresias’ prophecy.⁸² He has now been punished with ‘big blows’.

⁸² Jens, 1967, says that Creon is punished, despite his eventual burial of Polynices, because he is actually not changed: ‘Er glaubt immer noch, er brauche nur seinen Befehl rückgängig zu machen und die Ordnung des Daseins wäre wieder hergestellt’ (p. 310).

The words, however, also fit Antigone: she, too, pronounced ‘big words’, not only in her speech to Creon but also in her quarrels with Ismene (69-77, 542-9). Indeed, in the second *stasimon*, the *choreutai* specifically accused her of ‘folly in speech’ (λόγου [...] ἄνοια, 603). Her ‘big words’, then, are also punished with ‘big blows’.

The expression ‘in old age’, however, is odd since neither Antigone nor Creon has yet reached this stage in life. Instead, the term is more appropriate for the Elders whose mature years the king commented on in the scene with the guard (281). The chorus may, then, actually be asserting that *they* have achieved good sense in their old age by observing that impiety towards the gods and boasting words are always punished. As we have seen, however, the judgement of the group as a whole, and especially of the pro-Creon voice within it, has not always been good.⁸³

In the concluding lines of the tragedy, then, we have the same tensions as in the rest of the play: it is up to each spectator to decide whether choral utterances are authoritative or not. Moreover, they have to make up their own minds whether comments and judgements apply to Creon or Antigone or, in fact, to both. The final interpretation of the action, then, is left open.

⁸³ Cf. Rösler, 1983, who concludes that the formulation of the *gnōmē* encourages the audience to think about ‘das Problem der Manipulierbarkeit (vielleicht nicht zufällig gerade einer Gruppe)’ (p. 122).

CHAPTER 4: AMBIGUITY IN THE *ELECTRA*

INTRODUCTION

So far, I have analysed the authoritativeness of the choral discourse in two of Sophocles' seven extant plays and found that, in both, there is a tension between utterances that can be used as a reliable guide to an interpretation of the action and those that cannot. In each tragedy, however, this tension was created in a slightly different way: in the *Philoctetes*, it was the deceit plan that made the trustworthiness of the discourse uncertain; in the *Antigone* it was the fractured nature of the chorus.

This chapter is about the *Electra*, and here it is initially the *locus* of the authoritative voice that is unclear. At the start of the play, both the chorus and Electra display similar markers of authoritativeness and both, therefore, sound credible. As the action unfolds, however, the trustworthiness of Electra's utterances becomes increasingly uncertain. This leaves it open how we are meant to respond to her portrayal of the matricide at the end of the tragedy. The authoritativeness of the choral odes is also uncertain. As a stage figure, the *choreutai* entirely approve of the revenge action. The mode and level of their communication, however, is often ambiguous, and this leaves it open whether choral comments are truly reliable. In addition, the *stasima* regularly evoke earlier versions of the myth of Electra's family and, since poets, especially in the course of the fifth century, increasingly focused on the ethically problematic aspects of the killing of Clytemnestra, this creates dark undertones that undermine the chorus's apparent support for the action. Let me briefly mention the most relevant precedents.

The first extant telling of the story is in Homer's *Odyssey*.¹ There, the matricide is not specifically mentioned; instead, Orestes is presented as

¹ 1.29-30, 32-43, 193-8, 250-75, 304-10; 3.309-10; 4.92, 514-37, 545-7; 11.409-34, 452-3; 24.97, 199-201.

a model for Telemachus, as a good son who fulfils his duty towards his father, unjustly killed by his wicked mother and her seducer Aegisthus. In Pindar's *Pythian* 11,² Clytemnestra is also portrayed negatively, as a 'pitiless woman' (νηλὴς γυνά, 22). The poet, however, gives two possible motives for her murder of Agamemnon: her husband's 'sacrificial slaying of Iphigenia' (Ἰφιγένει' [...] σφαχθεῖσα, 22-23) and her own 'night-time love-making' (ἔννυχτοι [...] κοῖται, 24) with Aegisthus.

In the *Oresteia*, Aeschylus adds another layer of complexity by introducing the Trojan princess Cassandra whom Agamemnon has taken as his concubine: this gives Clytemnestra yet another reason for killing her husband. In addition, although the vengeance is ordered by Apollo, Orestes is hounded by his mother's Erinyes after the killing. He is only acquitted in an Athenian courtroom in the third play of the trilogy when Athena, using her casting vote, announces that 'he has escaped the charge of bloodshed' (ἐκπέφευγεν αἵματος δίκην, *Eumenides*, 752) and persuades Clytemnestra's Erinyes to give up their pursuit of the mother-killer. This finally ends the cycle of violence caused by the *lex talionis*.

Euripides' *Electra* and *Orestes* raise even graver questions, not only to do with the matricide itself, but also with the personality³ of the perpetrators.⁴ In the *Electra*, Clytemnestra and Aegisthus are killed by means of deceit and at a time when they are at their most vulnerable.

² The scholia give two conflicting dates for *Pythian* 11, 474 and 454 BCE. If the earlier date is correct, the ode would have been performed before Aeschylus' *Oresteia* of 458 BCE.

³ For the controversies surrounding the use of the word 'personality' or 'character' in fiction, see the *Philoctetes* chapter, p. 62, n. 1.

⁴ Euripides' *Orestes* was performed in 408 BCE. The exact date of his *Electra*, however, is unknown. The first performance of Sophocles' *Electra* is also uncertain. Finglass, 2007, p. 1, writes that scholars now generally place it towards the end of the poet's career, on the basis of perceived similarities with the *Philoctetes* (409 BCE) and the *Oedipus Coloneus* (401 BCE). It is not clear, however, which of the two *Electra* plays came first, Euripides' or Sophocles'. Among the scholars who believe that Euripides' *Electra* was earlier are Wilamowitz, 1883, p. 223; Friis Johansen, 1959, p. 11; Kamerbeek, 1974, p. 7; Winnington-Ingram, 1980, p. 342; and Segal, 1966, p. 521, n. 61. Contra: Jebb, 1894, p. lvi; Vögler, 1967; Lloyd-Jones, 1969. The issue cannot be proved conclusively. My argument is strengthened if Euripides' *Electra* is the older play and even more so if his *Orestes* came before Sophocles' *Electra*, but it does not rely on it.

Although the play ends with the promise of Orestes' eventual acquittal in an Athenian court of law, the warning that he will be hounded by the Erinyes, the 'terrible goddesses of death' (δειναὶ [...] κῆρες, 1252), and the distress of the siblings makes for a much less comforting ending of the play than the last tragedy in Aeschylus' trilogy. In the *Orestes*, the protagonist actually imagines himself being pursued by the Erinyes (34-45, 255-74),⁵ and both he and his sister are later condemned to death by the citizens of Argos on the grounds that they should have taken their mother to a homicide court. In the end, they are saved by the intervention of Apollo, but the supposed resolution of the conflict leaves many questions open.

Spectators who saw Sophocles' *Electra* within this context, may have been puzzled by the supposedly "happy ending", and this uncertainty about the "correct" interpretation continues to the present day. Broadly, there are two camps. On the one side are, what Finglass (2007) calls, the 'optimists'.⁶ The siblings' revenge, they argue, has been ordered by Apollo,⁷ and the character of Electra and Orestes is unblemished.⁸ Moreover, in contrast to Aeschylus' *Choephoroe*, the Erinyes

⁵ See also Euripides *IT* 79-81, 279-308.

⁶ Most nineteenth-century scholars followed the optimistic reading by Schlegel, 1816. Jebb, 1894, draws attention to its Homeric colouring and concludes that, since in the *Odyssey* the vengeance has both divine and human approval (Athena, 1.298-9; Nestor, 3.195-8; Menelaus, 4.514-47), Sophocles 'regards the deed as of unalloyed merit, which brings the troubles of the house to an end' (pp. xxxix-xl). Among twentieth century 'optimists' are Waldock, 1951; Whitman, 1951; Alexanderson, 1966; Woodard, 1964 and 1965; Musurillo, 1967; Reinhardt, 1979; Burton, 1980; Gardiner, 1980; Scodel, 1984; March, 1996 and 2001; MacLeod, 2001. Bowra, 1944, also comes to an affirmative reading of the play although he admits that the killings are presented as 'undeniably painful, even revolting' (p. 230). Contra, e.g. Sheppard, 1927; Friis Johansen, 1959; Segal, 1966; Kells, 1974; Winninton-Ingram, 1980.

⁷ Cf. Reinhardt, 1979: Apollo appears 'as instigator, not only of the deed but also of its manner of execution' (p. 137).

⁸ Cf. Schlegel, 1816: 'the sister [is] endued with unshaken constancy in true and noble sentiments, and the invincible heroism of endurance; the brother prompt and vigorous in all the energy of youth' (p. 131).

do not appear at the end of the play.⁹ Finally, the chorus condemn Clytemnestra and Aegisthus and continually emphasise the justice of the vengeance and the support of the gods. We, too, therefore, the optimists argue, are meant to approve of the action.¹⁰

On the other side of the argument are the ‘pessimists’: they raise questions about the manner of the oracle,¹¹ take issue with the personality and conduct of the siblings,¹² and draw attention to the sinister parallels in the behaviour and action of the two opposing parties.¹³ They, therefore, conclude that, while the play does not explicitly end with the Erinys, their presence is implicit.¹⁴

So far, most scholarly writing has been divided between these two, diametrically opposed, readings of the play, and many critics have ignored or distorted the more problematic utterances in order to come to their particular ‘optimistic’ or ‘pessimistic’ reading on the action. The commentaries by Kells (1973) and March (2001) are probably the most extreme examples of this tendency.

Again, I shall take a somewhat different approach. In my view, many disagreements among spectators and scholars arise because it is never entirely clear which utterances are trustworthy and which are not. My analysis in this chapter will, therefore, centre around the

⁹ Cf. Schlegel, 1816: ‘what more especially characterizes the tragedy of Sophocles, is the heavenly serenity beside a subject so terrible’ (p. 132).

¹⁰ Cf. March, 2001, p. 17.

¹¹ Cf. Sheppard, 1927, who argues that Orestes was wrong to ask the Delphic oracle ‘*by what means*’ (33) he should take vengeance; instead, he should have enquired more generally *what* he should do. Sheppard refers to a number of instances, especially in Herodotus and Xenophon, where questions to an oracle were similarly misframed – with disastrous consequences.

¹² Cf. Winnington-Ingram (1980, p. 245) who argues that Electra and Orestes care for one parent only, their father, and that the murder of the other, their mother, makes them liable to punishment by Zeus.

¹³ Cf. Friies Johansen, 1959; Segal, 1966; Winninton-Ingram, 1980; Seaford, 1985.

¹⁴ Winnington-Ingram, 1980, comes to a different conclusion: for him, ‘Electra is in fact conceived and drawn as at once the victim and the agent of the Furies’ (p. 228). For an analysis of the misconception of leaving out the Erinyes in an interpretation of the tragedy, see Davies, 1999.

authoritativeness of the discourse of *both* the chorus and Electra and, instead of explaining away inconsistencies and ambiguities, I shall show how they contribute to different possible interpretations of the tragedy.

As in the previous two chapters, I shall now analyse the play scene by scene. I shall spend some time showing how the voice of Electra is first set up in her monody and how, in the *parodos*, it compares with that of the chorus. Moreover, since Electra's potential authoritativeness plays such an important role in this tragedy, I shall also examine her utterances in the episodes. I shall start each section with a brief overview, then analyse the language of the protagonist and the chorus more closely.

1. ELECTRA'S MONODY (86-120)

Electra's monody follows on immediately from the prologue where Orestes explained to the Paedagogus and Pylades how they would avenge the murder of Agamemnon in accordance with the Pythian oracle. At the end, the three men heard a cry from the palace ('ah, ah, ill-fated me', ἰὼ μοί μοι δύστηνος, 77) and correctly assumed that it was uttered by Electra.¹⁵ Rather than revealing themselves, however, they left in order first to pour libations at Agamemnon's tomb, in accordance with Apollo's orders.

When Electra appears on stage, she is on her own.¹⁶ Her monody divides into two parts: in the first half, she apostrophises 'holy light and [...] air' (ὦ φάος ἄγνὸν / καὶ [...] ἀήρ, 86-7), describes her nightly sung dirges (θρήνων ᾠδάς, 87) and laments for her father, murdered by her mother and Aegisthus; in the second part, she promises that she will not cease from her 'lamentations and wailing' (θρήνων [...] τε γόων, 104)

¹⁵ Cf. Ajax's groans of despair heard from within his tent before he makes his first appearance (*Ajax* 333, 336, 339).

¹⁶ Apart from the *Electra*, the *Ajax* (815-65) is the only other Sophoclean tragedy in which the protagonist appears alone on stage, without even the *choreutai* as an internal audience. The hero's suicide speech, however, occurs at the centre of the play not, as in the *Electra*, at the beginning.

and, in a passionate prayer, appeals for help from the divinities of the underworld, asking them to send Orestes. As we will see, the monody displays some of the features that are otherwise found in choral odes. This imbues the protagonist with an authoritativeness that goes beyond that of other Sophoclean stage figures. Before I show this in more detail, let me briefly review once more the terminology I am going to use in my analysis.

As I explained in chapter 1, the action in a Sophoclean tragedy is generally presented in one of two ways: it is either 'shown' through the speech acts of different characters (*mimesis*) or it is 'told' by a narrator (*diegesis*). In *mimesis*, stage figures (including the chorus) frequently say things which the audience know to be wrong. The reliability of information gleaned there is, consequently, low. In *diegesis*, however, the narrative technique approximates that of the Homeric narrator, and this signals the intrusion of the meta-diegetic voice and raises the communication to a higher level making utterances sound more trustworthy.

In the *Electra*, the protagonist's monody initially seems to be in the mimetic mode since there are a number of first person verbs, pronouns and possessive adjectives.¹⁷ Moreover, she addresses the heavenly entities, her dead father, and the Erinyes in the second person, and appeals to the divinities using imperatives.¹⁸ Electra, then, functions as a *dramatis persona* and, as such, the trustworthiness of her utterances is at the lower end of the spectrum or, more accurately, it needs verifying.

¹⁷ First person verbs: 'I lament', θρηνῶ, 94; 'I shall not cease', οὐ [...] λήξω, 103-4; 'I gaze', λεύσσω, 106; 'I utter', ἤχῳ, 109; and 'I no longer have the strength', οὐκέτι σωκῶ, 119; first person pronouns: 'me', μοι, 87, 118; 'μου', 10; first person possessive adjectives ('my', ἐμόν, 94, 118; 'my', 97; 'our', ἡμετέρου, 117.

¹⁸ Second person verbs: 'you have perceived', ἤσθου, 89; 'you father', σοῦ, πάτερ, 101; 'you look at', ὄραθ', 113; imperatives: 'come, aid, punish, [...] send', ἔλθετ', ἀρήξατε, τίσασθε, [...] πέμψατ', 115-17.

In many ways, however, Electra's first appearance is quite different from that of other stage figures. First, she is the only Sophoclean protagonist who enters before the *choreutai*. Her monody, then, in effect delays the choral *parodos*. Moreover, Electra chants, or maybe partly sings, in anapaests,¹⁹ and this is the traditional metre of the *parodos*.²⁰ Both visually and aurally, then, Electra's entrance is similar to that of the chorus.

Secondly, the narrative technique displays some features of *diegesis*. First, Electra starts by giving an overview of the situation (her nightly lamentations); she then homes in on her 'miserable house' (μογερῶν οἴκων, 93) and, even closer, on her bed (εὐναί, 93). After that, with both a temporal and a spatial leap, she describes her father's death, trailing the course of the murder weapon as it splits his head (κάρα, 99). Her narrative technique, then, is not unlike that of the Homeric storyteller.

Thirdly, despite the markers of mimesis, the discourse presents Electra's grief at one removed, as perceived from outside: it is holy light and air who hear her lamentations, and it is her bed that observes her all-night vigils. In the process, the verb forms, too, shift: they begin in the second person ('you [the heavenly entities] perceive', ἦσθου, 89) but migrate to the third ('the bed knows', ξυνίσχασ' εὐναί, 93; Ares 'did not receive [Agamemnon] as his guest', οὐκ ἐξένισεν, 96; Clytemnestra and Aegisthus 'split his head', σχίζουσιν κάρα, 99). The account is more

¹⁹ West, 1982, pp. 121-2, identifies a number of features of melic or sung anapaests: much contraction of *bicipia*, catalectic anapaests not just in the final place, the occurrence of dimeters without word division, and Doric coloration. All of these are present at the beginning of Electra's monody and Finglass, 2007, therefore, believes that for lines 88-89, at least, the heroine moves from 'recitative to lyric anapaests, [...] probably as a mark of [her] intense emotion' (p. 118). I would argue that the approximation to the choral style of performance potentially also increases the protagonist's authoritativeness. Contra, among others, Kamerbeek, 1974, p. 31 (between recitative and melic); Burton, 1980, p. 189 (lyric); and Nooter, 2012, p. 104, n. 11 (chanted).

²⁰ The first part of the *parodos* of the *Ajax* (134-71) is entirely in anapaests. As we saw, the *parodoi* of the *Antigone* and the *Philoctetes* include some anapaestic sections, performed by the *coryphaeus* and Neoptolemus, respectively. The same is true for the *Oedipus Coloneus*. Only in the *Trachiniae* and *Oedipus Tyannus* are the *parodoi* performed entirely in lyric.

impersonal than a description entirely in the first person, and the admixture of diegetic elements in an otherwise mimetic context suggests the intrusion of the meta-diegetic voice, potentially raising the communication to the second level.²¹ This makes the language of Electra's monody sound more trustworthy than a song or speech entirely in mimesis.

Fourthly, the style is highly elevated and, as in the *Philoctetes*, the poetic markers are used to draw attention to the main drivers of the action. As I explained in chapter 1, linguistic intensification and proleptic utterances are two of the markers that signal the intrusion of the extra-diegetic voice, the voice that controls all aspects of the discourse and the overarching shape of the play. Its presence raises the communication to the highest level, imbuing utterances with the greatest degree of authoritativeness. Let me give three examples.

When Electra describes that, as part of her nightly lamentations, she aims ‘many blows against my bloodied breasts’ (*πολλὰς δ’ ἀντήρεις ἥσθου / στέρνων πληγὰς αἵμασσομένων*, 90), nearly all the short syllables of the anapaests have been contracted. This creates a heavy, spondaic rhythm (— — — — — — — — — — — ∪ —) which aurally echoes the heroine’s act of self-beating. The language no longer sounds like that of a mere stage figure, but foregrounds the voice that has carefully selected the words. Here, it reflects the depth of the protagonist’s despair and thus foreshadows Electra’s hatred of Clytemnestra.

My second example is the description of Agamemnon's murder: we are told that Clytemnestra and Aegisthus 'split [the king's] head with a murderous axe, as woodcutters split an oak' (ὄπως δρυὸν ὑλοτόμοι / σχίζουσι κάρα φονίῳ πελέκει, 99). The simile evokes both the *Iliad* and

²¹ Ajax and Philoctetes also summon inanimate entities at the height of their suffering (*Aj.* 412-27; *Phil.* 1081-94). After the apostrophes, however, their discourse immediately returns to first-person verbs: in contrast to Electra, they unmistakably perform in the mimetic mode.

the *Odyssey*. In the *Iliad*, for instance, the Trojan hero Sarpedon is mortally wounded by Patroclus and drops to the ground ‘as when an *oak* falls [...] which carpenters cut down in the mountains with their newly whetted axes for ship-timber’ (ὥς ὅτε τις δρυὺς ἥριπεν [...], τήν τ’ οὐρεσι τέκτονες ἄνδρες / ἐξέταμον πελέκεσσι νεήκεσι νήϊον εἶναι, 16.482-4). The simile in the *Electra*, with its reminder of the son of Zeus who died honourably and heroically on the battlefield, suggests that Agamemnon deserved the same honour. In his case, however, it was not ‘murderous Ares’ (φοίνιος Ἄρης, *El.*, 96) who took him; instead, he was brutally assaulted and treacherously killed with the aid of a ‘murderous axe’ (φονίῳ πελέκει, 99) wielded by his own wife and her ‘bed-fellow’ (κοινολεχίης, 97). In book 3 of the *Odyssey*, an ‘axe’ (πέλεκυν, 442) is also used, but here it kills a sacrificial cow. Agamemnon, then, the simile in Sophocles’ *Electra* also implies, died in a perverted sacrifice scene, taken as much by surprise as the sacrificial animal in the *Odyssey*. Again, the verses are so highly crafted that they signal the intrusion of the extra-diegetic voice. This makes Electra’s judgement sound credible: Agamemnon, we feel, did indeed die ‘in a shameless and pitiful manner’ (αἰκῶς οἰκτρῶς τε, 102), as she asserts.

My final example is from the end of the monody, from Electra’s prayer to the chthonic deities. The apostrophes are arranged in a tricolon *crescendo*: Hades and Persephone are mentioned by name only; Hermes and the Curse are accompanied by single, near-rhyming epithets, χθόνι’ (‘of the underworld’, 111) and πότνι’ (‘august’, 111); the Erinyes, however, are given a complete verse (‘holy children of the gods’, σεμναί [...] θεῶν παῖδες, 112), immediately followed by a description of their function, arranged anaphorically (‘who [...] who, αἳ [...] αἳ, 113-14): the Erinyes look upon ‘those unjustly slain’ (τοὺς ἀδίκως θνήσκοντας, 113) and those ‘who secretly steal marriage beds’ (τοὺς εὐνὰς ὑποκλεπτομένους, 114). This emphasis on the Erinyes creates the expectation that, as in Aeschylus, Clytemnestra and Aegisthus will be punished at the end of the play for the

murder of Agamemnon and for their adultery. The extra-diegetic voice, then, uses Electra's discourse to prepare for the overarching shape or *gestalt* of the play, drawing attention to the theme of the *lex talionis* according to which kin-killing must be avenged by the offspring of the murder-victim.²² Overall, then, the style of Electra's monody suggests that we can trust her evaluation of the situation.

Together with the markers of mimesis, however, there are also first hints that raise questions about the protagonist's authoritativeness and behaviour.²³ As we saw, the spondaic rhythm emphasises the physical nature of Electra's grief: she beats her chest to such an extent that her breasts have become 'bloodied' (αἵμασσομένων, 90). Moreover, her lamentations are highly public: she states that 'by shrieking before the doors of my father's palace I sound out my utterances *for all to hear*' (ἐπὶ κωκυτῷ τῶνδε πατρῶων / πρὸ θυρῶν ἤχῳ πᾶσι προφωνεῖν, 108-9). These acts are, for Electra, a proof of her devotion to her father. For a contemporary Athenian spectator, however, they may have sounded problematic: Solon's sumptuary laws specifically banned female mourners from lacerating themselves and women in general from exhibiting 'disorderly' (ἄτακτον) and 'undisciplined' (ἀκόλαστον) conduct in public (Plutarch 'Solon' 21.4).²⁴ Rather than being a sign of piety, then, the protagonist's actions may have been felt to show a lack of moderation.²⁵

²² Cf. Alexiou, 1974, on the role of women in cases of vengeance: 'although the act rested with the men, unless there was no male survivor, the women maintained the consciousness for the need to take revenge by constant lamentation and invocation at the tomb' (p. 22).

²³ Cf. Seaford, 1985, and Swift, 2010, p. 337-9.

²⁴ It is not quite clear in Plutarch if Solon's law refers specifically to funerary practices or to women's behaviour more generally. Electra's activities, however, would be transgressive in either case.

²⁵ See Seaford, 1985, for other aspects of what he calls the 'perversion of mourning' (p. 315). For the unusual length of Electra's period of mourning, see Swift, 2010, p. 337. For a detailed analysis of the scene, including the form of the *kommós*, see Goldhill, 2012, pp. 113-19.

This raises questions about her ability to make rational and authoritative judgements.

Secondly, the extra-diegetic voice creates ambiguity by employing a particular mythological *comparandum*. Electra says that she wails in front of the palace doors ‘like a nightingale’ (ὥς τις ἀηδῶν, 107). Bowra (1944) writes that, in the *Odyssey*, Penelope also compares herself to the nightingale ‘mourning’ (ὀλοφυρομένη, 19.522) her beloved child, and he concludes that ‘the nightingale is the type of grief that is inconsolable because it is faithful’ (p. 243). The *exemplum* in the *Electra*, however, is more difficult to read: the bird is described with the qualifying adjective ‘child-destroying’ (τεκνολέτειρα, 107), and this acts as a reminder that it was Procne herself who killed Itys because she wanted to punish her husband for the rape of Philomena, Procne’s sister.²⁶ For Swift (2010), therefore, the *comparandum* ‘undermines [Electra’s] self-representation as pitiful victim and instead portrays her as a murderous figure, foreshadowing the killing of Clytemnestra’ (p. 339). Overall, then, it is left open whether Electra’s faithfulness to the memory of her father is admirable or if her suffering, like Procne’s, is partly self-inflicted.

Let me sum up how Electra’s voice is set up in the monody. First, structurally, visually and aurally, Electra’s entry delays that of the chorus. This gives her a prominence which exceeds that of other stage figures in Sophocles. Secondly, the *mode* of communication is ambiguous: Electra’s discourse contains a number of markers of diegesis and, therefore, sounds more trustworthy than if it were entirely in the ‘showing mode’ of the episodes. Thirdly, the monody displays some of the narrative devices employed by the Homeric narrator, suggesting that the communication takes place on the second *level*. Finally, the employment of highly poetic

²⁶ See Gantz, 1993, pp. 240-41, for the myth of Procne.

language and the foreshadowing of the general *gestalt* of the play elevates it to the highest level. Overall, Electra's discourse is made to sound reliable, her grief and desire for revenge justified, and her judgement credible. At the same time, however, there are some subtle hints that her assessments may not be entirely reliable and that her suffering may be partly self-inflicted.

2. THE *PARODOS* (121-250)

The *parodos* follows on immediately from Electra's solo. It is a long lyric exchange between the protagonist and the chorus of Argive women, and consists of three strophic pairs and an epode. Let me start by giving a brief outline: in strophe and antistrophe A, the *choreutai* show sympathy for Electra and try to console her. At the same time, however, they also criticise her for plunging 'from moderation to unmanageable grief' (ἀπὸ τῶν μετρίων ἐπ' ἀμήχανον / ἄλγος, 140-1). The young woman, on the other hand, cites two mythological parallels, Itys (147), as in her monody, and Niobe (150), both of whom also wept ceaselessly in their grief.²⁷

In strophe and antistrophe B, the *choreutai* try to console Electra by pointing out that Agamemnon's other children, Chrysothemis and Iphianassa, who also live in the palace, do not suffer as much as she does. They also sing about Orestes, who is being brought up in exile but whom they expect to return to Mycenae. Electra, however, rejects this reassurance, saying that, despite the 'messages' (ἀγγελίας, 170) that show that her brother 'always feels the longing' (ἀεὶ [...] ποθεῖ, 171) to come back to avenge their father's murder, he does not actually appear. She then

²⁷ We have already seen that Procne is a problematic mythological *exemplum*. The same is true for Niobe: in the *Iliad* (24.602-17) we learn that Niobe boasted to Leto that she had borne many children while the goddess only had two. This so angered the mother of Apollo and Artemis that she had them kill all the children. Niobe too, then, was partly responsible for the death of her children. Contra Bowra, 1944, for whom Niobe represents 'the type of inconsolable sorrow. Even when she has been turned to stone she continues to lament for her children' (p. 243).

describes her life in the palace, without children and a husband to protect her (164-5, 187-8), forced to serve ‘like some unworthy alien’ (ἀπερεί τις ἔποικος ἀναξία, 190), ‘clad in mean attire’ (ἀεικεῖ σὺν στολᾷ, 191), and without proper food, ‘standing around empty tables’ (κεναῖς δ’ ἀμφίσταμαι τραπέζαις, 192).

In strophe and antistrophe C, both the chorus and Electra recall Agamemnon’s death. However, while Electra proceeds to curse the murderers, the *choreutai* counsel against fighting ‘those in power’ (τοῖς δυνατοῖς, 219). Nonetheless, the protagonist insists that she will not refrain from her ‘ruinous actions’ (ἄτας, 224). In the epode, the *choreutai* again advise Electra not to make the situation worse for herself while she maintains that her behaviour is the only way to show reverence and piety.

The *parodos* is important in two respects: first, it reveals the relationship between Electra and the chorus; secondly, it establishes the level of authoritativeness of the choral discourse and allows us to compare it with that of protagonist. Let me deal with the relationship first.

The *choreutai* are clearly aligned with Electra: they repeatedly call her ‘child’ (παῖ, 121; τέκνον, 155, 175) and talk of themselves as ‘a trusty mother’ (μάτηρ [...] πιστά, 234). They also try to give her hope (θάρσει μοι, θάρσει, ‘have courage, courage’, 174), and assure her of their ‘goodwill’ (εὐνοία, 233). Moreover, they are openly hostile to Clytemnestra, describing her as ‘most wretched’ (δυστανστάτας, 121) and ‘deceitful’ (δολερᾶς, 124). Finally, also like Electra, they condemn the murder of Agamemnon as ‘most unholy’ (ἄθεώτατα, 124) and express the wish that ‘the doer may perish’ (ὁ τάδε πορῶν ὅλοιτ’, 126-7). This not only shows their sympathy for Electra, it also makes the protagonist’s judgements in the monody sound more trustworthy.

The Argive women’s compassion, however, does not stop them from criticising Electra: they try to convince her of the futility of her

lamentation by adducing a number of traditional *topoi* of consolation²⁸ and advise her to take a more pragmatic approach, leaving the revenge to Zeus (162, 174-5), Orestes (180-82), and Hades (183). Overall, then, while sympathetic to the protagonist's suffering, the chorus present an alternative response to Agamemnon's murder. This raises the question whose discourse is more authoritative.

First, both the chorus and Electra perform in lyric throughout: as in the monody, this gives the protagonist a voice that, aurally at least, approximates that of the chorus. The Argive women, on the other hand, lose some of their traditional distinctiveness: by singing an *amoibaion* instead of a solo entry song, they are less differentiated from the protagonist than the *choreutai* in the *Antigone*. This makes their precise function ambiguous.

Secondly, as we have seen, the trustworthiness of a discourse depends partly on the mode and level of communication. In almost the entire *parodos*, both the chorus and Electra operate as a *dramatis persona* whose discourse is prompted by their participation in the action. The level of communication, then, as well as the reliability of their evaluation of the situation, is low.

This, however, suddenly changes in strophe C when the *choreutai* give a sketch of the killing of Agamemnon which, in content, language, and metre evokes Electra's account in the monody. Since I shall analyse the lines in detail, it is worth quoting them in full (193-200):

οἰκτρὰ μὲν νόστοις αὐδᾶ,
οἰκτρὰ δ' ἐν κοίταις πατρῶαις
ὅτε οἱ παγχάλκων ἀνταῖα
γενύων ὠρμάθη πλαγὰ.

²⁸ Cf. *Iliad* 24 where Achilles employs similar *topoi* to comfort Priam (522-51) and Euripides' *Electra* (167-212) where the *choreutai* also try to console the protagonist.

δόλος ἦν ὁ φράσας, ἔρος ὁ κτείνας,
 δεινὰν δεινῶς προφυτεύσαντες
 μορφάν, εἴτ' οὖν θεὸς εἴτε βροτῶν
 ἦν ὁ ταῦτα πράσσων.

Piteous was the cry at his homecoming, piteous as the father lay there, when the blow of the brazen axe came straight at him, in his breast! Cunning was the teacher, passion the killer; terribly they engendered a terrible shape, whether it was a god or a mortal who was the doer.

All the verbs in the choral section of this stanza are in the third person ('piteous *was* the cry', οἰκτρὰ μὲν [...] αὐδὰ, 193; the blows '*came* at him', ὠρμάθη πλαγὰ, 96; 'it *was*', ἦν, 97, 201): the discourse is suddenly in *diegesis*. Moreover, the narrative technique approximates that of the Homeric storyteller: the *choreutai* first allude to the overall context, Agamemnon's 'homecoming' (νόστοις, 193), then zoom in on the king's death 'scream' (αὐδὰ, 193) and, closer still, on his body 'as it lies there' (ἐν κοίταις, 194).²⁹ Finally, just like Electra in her monody, they trace the course of the murder weapon, singing that 'the blows of the brazen axe came straight at him, in his breast' (οἱ παγχάλκων ἀνταῖα / γενύων ὠρμάθη πλαγὰ, 195-6).³⁰ After that, they give a brief insight into the minds of the assassins, attributing their deed to 'cunning' (δόλος, 197) and 'sexual passion' (ἔρος, 197). For one stanza, the meta-diegetic voice

²⁹ As Finglass, 2007, points out κοίτη 'can denote either the state or the place of lying' (p. 161). If we take ἐν κοίταις (194) to refer to the place of lying, a bed, then the wording may evoke the chorus's lament for the king in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*: 'Ah me, to lie on this slavish *bed*, struck down in treacherous death wrought by a weapon of double edge wielded by the hand of your own wife' (ὦμοι μοι κοίταν τάνδ' ἀνελεύθερον / δολίῳ μόρῳ δαμείς δάμαρτος / ἐκ χειρὸς ἀμφιτόμῳ βελέμνῳ, 1494-6). The Aeschylean intertext would further emphasise the treachery of Clytemnestra's deed.

³⁰ There is actually a slight discrepancy in the two descriptions of the murder: in her monody, Electra stated that the axe split Agamemnon's *head* (κάρα, 99) while here, in the *parodos*, the chorus sing that it hit the king *frontally* (ἀνταῖα, 195). The difference is minor, but it is the first indication that the two discourses may not be equally authoritative.

intrudes into the discourse, raising the communication to the second level. Moreover, since, after their criticism of Electra's behaviour, the Argive women suddenly assimilate her view of Agamemnon's killing, both their and the protagonist's evaluation of the crime sounds trustworthy.

The authoritativeness of the chorus's discourse is further enhanced by an accumulation of poetic devices: each verse is memorable and emphasises what is important. The stanza starts with an anaphora (pitiful [...] / pitiful, οἰκτρὰ μὲν [...] / οἰκτρὰ δ', 193-4): the *choreutai* clearly sympathise with the king and, by implication, with Electra's response to his murder. In the next two verses the syntax is striking, with words that grammatically belong together being pulled apart: παγχάλκων, 'brazen', 195, is separated from γενύων, 'axe', 196; ἀνταία, 'in his breast', 195, from πλαγὰ, 'blows', 196. The hyperbaton reflects the confusion of the murder scene and thus stresses the violence and treachery of the deed. The next verse, on the other hand, ('cunning was the teacher, passion the killer', δόλος ἦν ὁ φράσας, ἔρος ὁ κτείνας, 197) stands out for its utter simplicity and lucidity: two paratactic clauses are organised asyndetically around a strong central caesura, with symmetrical word order on either side. This makes the judgement crystal clear: Agamemnon was killed deceitfully, by using 'cunning' (δόλος), and the murder was motivated by ἔρος, Clytemnestra and Aegisthus's sexual passion for each other. The extra-diegetic voice intrudes into the choral discourse, raising the communication to the third level. This makes the choral judgement of the murderers sound authoritative.

In the final part of the stanza, the extra-diegetic voice makes itself felt in a new way, by what Iser (1974, p. 280) calls 'gaps', phrases for which there is no unambiguous interpretation and which, as I explained in chapter 1, force the spectator to try to work out what the 'creative sensibility' behind the text may have in mind. These, too, are heightened by poetic devices: 'terribly [the murderers] engendered a terrible shape'

(δεινὰν δεινῶς προφυτεύσαντες / μορφάν, 198-9) contains the polyptoton ‘terribly terrible’ (δεινὰν δεινῶς, 198) which stresses the awfulness of the crime. It is unclear, however, what exactly is meant by this ‘terrible shape’. The next sentence presents an even greater riddle: after so clearly identifying Clytemnestra and Aegisthus’ cunning and passion as the main drivers of the crime, the *choreutai* suddenly wonder ‘whether it was a god or a mortal who was the doer’ (εἴτ’ οὖν θεὸς εἴτε βροτῶν / ἦν ὁ ταῦτα πράσσων, 199-200). This question can only be answered by the extra-diegetic voice who has a vision of the *gestalt*, the overall shape, of the play. These riddles give an added edge to the potential authoritativeness of the choral discourse.

Let me now turn to *Electra*: the style of her response in strophe C is also elevated: after a triple apostrophe (‘oh [...] day, oh night, oh [...] sorrows’, ὦ [...] ἀμέρα / ὦ νύξ, ὦ [...] / ἄχθη, 201, 203-4), she appeals to the Olympian gods to ‘give suffering [to the murderers] to suffer as punishment’ (ποινίμα πάθεα παθεῖν πόροι, 210). In Greek, the wish stands out for the fourfold alliteration of /π/ and the polyptoton ‘suffering to suffer’ (πάθεα παθεῖν). These apparent intrusions of the extra-diegetic voice make the protagonist’s discourse sound reliable and lend weight to her assertion that her father’s murder, in effect, also ‘took my life away’ (τὸν ἐμὸν εἶλον βίον, 207). On the other hand, the repeated first person markers (‘to me’, μοι, 202; ‘my’, ἐμός, 205, ἐμόν, 207; ‘me’, μ’, 208) show that the mode is mimetic. Altogether, then, it is ambiguous whether the poetic markers in her response signal the authoritativeness of her utterances or whether they are an indication of her emotional state.³¹ For the moment, however, the strength of *Electra*’s feelings create sympathy

³¹ Cf. Silk, 1999, to whom I referred in chapters 1 and 2, who argues that an intensified style does not, *per se*, indicate what he calls ‘choral authority’ (p. 17). It is only when it is not ‘relatable to any personalized emotion, nor to any personal specificities associated with those uttering the words’ (p. 15), that it ‘raises an expectation (no more) that its free discourse carries authority’ (p. 17).

for her and heighten the impression that we can trust her presentation of the terrible wrongdoings in the palace.

After this one stanza, the utterances of both the *choreutai* and the protagonist return to the mimetic mode, and the attitude of the Argive women again differs from that of Electra: in the epode, they advise her ‘not to create misery by means of misery’ (μὴ τίκτειν [...] ἄταν ἄταις, 235).³² The young woman, however, maintains that she will not restrain her lamentation since, if the killers of her father do not pay for their crime, ‘that would be the end of reverence and of the piety of all mortals’ (ἔρροι τ’ ἄν αἰδῶς / ἀπάντων τ’ εὐσέβεια θνατῶν, 249-50). It is still not clear whose utterances are more trustworthy.

Let me sum up what we have learnt in the *parodos* about the potential authoritativeness of the discourse of the protagonist and the chorus. First, rather than introducing the *choreutai* in a solo entry song, the *parodos* is in the form of an *amoibaion*. This emphasises the main function of the Argive women: they operate as a stage figure. The mode, too, is mainly mimetic. The views of Electra and the chorus are, therefore, pitched against each other on the primary level of communication, with the protagonist defending her continued lamentation while the chorus are counselling moderation. Neither participant is presented as more trustworthy than the other.

This changes abruptly in strophe C when the *choreutai* recall the murder of Agamemnon. The narrative technique suddenly approximates that of the Homeric storyteller, signalling the intrusion of the meta-diegetic voice and raising the communication to a higher level. Moreover, the style is highly elevated, with different poetic devices clustered

³² As in the *Philoctetes* and the *Antigone*, the repetition of the word *atē* (224, 235) may suggest that there is something in Electra’s personality that contributes to her infatuation with her father.

together in just eight verses. This imbues the choral discourse with the greatest authoritativeness. In addition, rather than continuing their call for moderation, the *choreutai* suddenly assimilate Electra's assessment of the murder of Agamemnon. For just one stanza, both discourses sound equally trustworthy. In Electra's response, the style is elevated, too. Although the mimetic markers suggest that she is operating as a stage figure, the emotional force of her argument is likely to encourage spectators to side with her and believe her presentation of the offences committed in the palace.

The rest of the *parodos* is entirely in *mimesis* again, and the communication of both the protagonist and the chorus returns to the primary level. In the end, then, the precise *locus* of the authoritative voice remains unclear at the end of the *parodos*.

3. THE FIRST EPISODE (251-471) AND THE FIRST STASIMON (472-515)

After the *parodos*, protagonist and *choreutai* return to performing in a more traditional manner, Electra as a participant in the action, the *choreutai* as commentators on the events performed on stage. We, therefore, have to evaluate the authoritativeness of their utterances separately, Electra's in a spoken conversation with her sister (324-471), the chorus's in the first *stasimon* (472-515). Let me start with an overview of the episode.

Chrysothemis, like the Argive women, begins by displaying her opposition to the rulers: she admits that 'if I had the strength, I would show them how I am minded towards them' (εἰ σθένος / λάβοιμι, δηλώσαιμ' ἂν οἱ αὐτοῖς φρονῶ, 333-4). She also concedes that 'justice' (τὸ [...] δίκαιον, 338) lies with Electra's way of judging the situation. This indirectly legitimises the protagonist's views.

Moreover, Chrysothemis reveals that, as soon as Aegisthus returns, her sister will be shut away in a dungeon unless she leaves off her lamentations. This confirms Electra's earlier claim, in her spoken

conversation with the Argive women, that her relations with her mother are ‘most hostile’ (ἔχθιστα, 262), that Clytemnestra regularly ‘barks’ at her (ύλακτεῖ, 299) and ‘insults’ her (ἐξυβρίζει, 293), calls her an ‘ungodly object of hate’ (δύσθεον μίσσημα, 289), and wishes for her to ‘perish miserably’ (κακῶς ὄλοιο, 291). Again, this strengthens the authoritativeness of her voice.

In many respects, however, Chrysothemis is as critical of her sister as the Argive women: she censures her for her ‘useless anger’ (θυμῶ ματαίῳ, 331), accuses her of ‘foolishness’ (ἄβουλίας, 398), and advises her to ‘think sensibly’ (εὖ φρονεῖν, 394) and ‘yield to those in power’ (τοῖς κρατοῦσι [...] εἰκαθεῖν, 396). Again, we have two different responses to the killing of Agamemnon and this, once more, raises the question how reliable Electra’s utterances are.

Indeed, there is an important detail in the protagonist’s conversation with Chrysothemis that subtly undermines her credibility. As we saw, Electra earlier told the *coryphaeus* how badly she is treated in the palace. Now, in reply to Chrysothemis’ suggestion to restrain her lamentations, she responds: ‘Do I not live miserably, but sufficiently for me? *And I give pain to them* (λυπῶ δὲ τούτους, 355), so that I do honour (τιμάς) to the dead’ (356). The utterance suggests that it may not be Clytemnestra and Aegisthus who are depriving Electra of the comforts of life but that this is her decision, that she dresses *herself* in rags and starves *herself* in order to ‘give pain’ to the royal couple and publicly signal her disapproval.³³ Many scholars take the information given by Electra at face value; now, however, there is a hint that her voice may not be fully trustworthy.

³³ Cf. Seaford, 1985, who also notes that Electra’s sufferings may be ‘self-imposed’ although he rightly says that the ambiguity is ‘unresolvable’ (p. 318). Orestes later confirms her ‘body dishonoured and godlessly ruined’ (σῶμ’ ἀτίμως καθέως ἐφθαρμένον, 1181). This, however, does not prove that Electra is not denying *herself* good food and clothing.

In the second part of the exchange between the two sisters, Chrysothemis tells Electra about their mother's nightmare (417-23) in which Agamemnon appeared to her, planting the sceptre usurped by Aegisthus beside the hearth so that it grew to overshadow Mycenae. Fearing her dream to be a bad omen, Clytemnestra has sent Chrysothemis to offer libations at Agamemnon's tomb. Electra, however, persuades her sister to replace them with their own gifts and to pray for Agamemnon's help against their enemies. This suggestion is supported as 'pious' (εὐσέβειαν, 464) by the *coryphaeus* who tells Chrysothemis to follow her sister's advice 'if you have any sense' (εἰ σωφρονήσεις, 465). The chorus-leader trusts Electra's judgement.

The first *stasimon* that follows emphasises how much the *choreutai* have suddenly assimilated the protagonist's view. The ode consists of a strophic pair and an epode and, in the strophe, they assert that they possess mantic powers and prophesy 'with confidence' (θάραρος, 479, 495) that 'Justice' (Δίκαια, 476) will finally come. In the antistrophe, they foretell the arrival of the Erinyes to punish the murderers for their 'blood-stained' (μυαιφόνων', 492) marriage and sing that, if Clytemnestra's nightmare does not find fulfilment, no prophecy in dreams and oracles can ever be believed again. The initial strophic pair, then, is full of joy and buoyancy.

In the epode, however, the discourse abruptly turns to the disasters that have befallen Electra's family. The *choreutai* allude to the horse race of Pelops and the death of Myrtilus, and hint at the terrible effect this event has had on the land. There is, then, a striking disjuncture between the first two stanzas and the last. This prompts the question whether the confidence which the chorus display in the first two stanzas is really credible. Let me first examine the markers of authoritativeness to establish the level of communication.

The *choreutai* start and end the first two stanzas as an intra-diegetic voice: they directly address Electra who remains on stage (ὦ τέκνον,

‘child’, 476) and employ a number of first and second person pronouns (‘I’, ‘γώ’, 473; ‘to me’, ‘μοι’, 479; ‘you’, ‘σ’, 483; ‘to us’, ‘ἡμῖν’, 496). When they describe themselves as ‘a prophet’ (μάντις, 473) possessing ‘wise judgement’ (γνώμας [...] σοφᾶς, 474), therefore, and when they assert that ‘Justice’ (Δίκη, 476) will come and that ‘just triumph’ (δίκαια [...] κράτη, 476) will be carried off by her, they do so as a friend of the protagonist to whom they want to offer moral support. Their optimism is expressed at the lowest level of authoritativeness.

The trustworthiness of their discourse is further undermined if we consider what, in chapter 1, I called horizontal and vertical overtones,³⁴ that is, other contexts within the tragedy itself or intertexts from beyond the play. *Dikē* (justice, punishment, vengeance) is a concept that was emphasised earlier in the play: in the prologue, Orestes told the Paedagogus that, when he consulted the Pythian oracle to find out ‘by what means to accomplish the *vengeance* for my father on his murderers’ (ὅτῳ τρόπῳ πατρὶ / δίκας ἀροίμην τῶν φονευσάντων πάρα, 33-4), Apollo ordered him to carry out ‘by cunning the slaughter done by a *righteous* hand’ (δόλοισι [...] χειρὸς ἐνδίκους σφαγᾶς, 37). Later, in an appeal to the house and the gods of the place, he asserted that ‘I come in *justice* to cleanse you’ (σοῦ γὰρ ἔρχομαι / δίκη καθαυτῆς, 69-70). Orestes, then, like the chorus, has no doubt that the murders he is planning are acts of justice.

His deceit plan, however, includes an element that is not strictly necessary for its success and actually takes it beyond what Apollo recommended: the hero advises the Paedagogus that he should announce his death ‘while speaking on oath’ (ὄρκον προστιθείς, 47). Finglass (2007) writes that this can simply be regarded as ‘one aspect of the *δόλος* which Apollo enjoined on him’ (p. 107). Swearing false oaths, however, was

³⁴ The two terms were coined by Kristeva, 1969, pp. 36-7.

believed to have serious consequences in antiquity.³⁵ As Mossman (2011) says: ‘the supreme deity [was] responsible for their policing. [...] Zeus Horkios in particular would avenge any infraction’ (p. 42).³⁶ Orestes, then, is prepared to act impiously in order to succeed.

This aspect of his personality receives further emphasis when, some ten lines later, he returns to the issue and explains at greater length why he thinks that it cannot hurt him ‘that I am dead in fiction, but in fact am safe and can win glory’ (ὅταν λόγῳ θανῶν / ἔργοισι σωθῶ καὶ ξενέγκωμαι κλέος, 59-60).³⁷ The hero now asserts that ‘no word that brings you *gain* is bad’ (οὐδὲν ῥῆμα σὺν κέρδει κακόν, 61). Kells (1973) writes that ‘again and again, in Greek literature of the age of Sophocles, when κέρδος (gain, profit) is juxtaposed with a moral value (ἀγαθόν, καλόν, δίκαιον, and so on), it is, practically proverbially, represented as a sign of *baseness* to prefer κέρδος to what is in principle good and honourable’ (p. 6, Kells’ italics). Like Odysseus in the *Philoctetes*, Orestes values glory (κλέος) and gain (κέρδος) above ethically correct action. The horizontal dialogic overtones with the prologue have an effect on the choral discourse in the *stasimon*: they raise the question whether the Argive women’s judgement that ‘Justice [...] shall come’ (εἴσιν ἅ [...] Δίκα, 474-5) is credible when the vengeance is performed by a man whose morality and piety are ambiguous.

Secondly, the strophic pair starts and finishes with a conditional clause in which the *choreutai* express confidence in their mantic powers: ‘if I am not a mistaken prophet’ (εἰ μὴ ἄγῳ παράφρων μάντις ἔφυν, 473),

³⁵ Cf. Sheppard, 1927: ‘perjury is not a safe device’ (p. 5).

³⁶ See also Janko on *Iliad* 14.271: ‘to take an oath is in effect to invoke powers greater than oneself to uphold the truth of a declaration, by putting a curse upon oneself if it is false’ (p. 194). Mossman, 2011, is writing about Jason’s breach of his oath in Euripides’ *Medea*. See also Sommerstein, 2014, p. 2, on the oath extracted from Aegeus (731-58) in the same play, and Sommerstein, 2007, pp. 1-6, on oaths more generally.

³⁷ After Electra’s urn speech, when she asks to be allowed to give his remains burial, Orestes advises her to ‘speak words of good omen’ (εὐφημα φώνει, 1211). He suddenly seems to realise that being dead in fiction can, in fact, be harmful.

they sing at the beginning of the ode, 'Justice [...] shall come' (εἶσιν ἅ [...] Δίκαια, 474-5) and, at the end, that there is no prophecy for mortals 'if this apparition in the night is not to find due fulfilment' (εἰ μὴ τόδε φάσμα νυκτὸς εὖ κατασχίσει, 501). The conditional clauses are reminiscent of the start of the third *stasimon* of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* which begins with almost the same words ('if I am a prophet and wise in my judgement', εἴπερ ἐγὼ μάντις εἰμὶ καὶ κατὰ γνώμαν ἴδρις, 1086-7). There, however, rather than finding their belief in Oedipus' superior, possibly divine, descent confirmed, the *choreutai* almost immediately discovered his real identity, that he was not only Jocasta's husband but also her son. The confidence of the *choreutai* of the *Electra* may be similarly misplaced: because of the vertical dialogic overtones, the conditional clauses that frame the strophic pair raise questions about their certainty.³⁸

The antistrophe, however, sounds more authoritative: as the *choreutai* sing about the arrival of the Erinyes and the punishment of the adulterous couple, the cumulation of poetic devices suggests the intrusion of the extra-diegetic voice (489-93):

ἥξει καὶ πολύπους καὶ πολύχειρ ἅ δεινοῖς
 κρυπτομένα λόχοις
 χαλκόπους Ἑρινύς.
 ἄλεκτρον ἄνυμφα γὰρ ἐπέβα μαιφόνων
 γάμων ἀμιλλήμαθ' οἷσιν οὐ θέμις.

She shall come, many-footed and many-handed, she who hides herself in
 terrible ambushes, the brazen-footed Erinyes! For the struggles for a blood-

³⁸ There is an unusually high number of conditional clauses in the *Electra*, i.e. 72. For comparison: *Aj.* 43, *Ant.* 48, *Phil.* 58, *Trach.* 62, *OC* 65. Only the *OT* has a larger number, 77, but, like the *Electra*, that play is characterised by what scholars traditionally call 'irony'.

stained wedlock, that brought an accused bed, an accursed bridal, came upon those for whom it was not right.

Let me start with the first sentence: the subject (the Erinys) is delayed to the end, placing greater emphasis on the bringer of vengeance. Moreover, she is qualified with three compound adjectives, ‘many-footed’, ‘many-handed’, and ‘brazen-footed’ (πολύπους, πολύχειρ, 489; χαλκόπους, 491), implying that the perpetrators of the murder cannot escape the Erinys’ many-pronged and determined pursuit. Finally, the *choreutai* sing that she awaits her victims ‘hiding herself in terrible ambushes’ (δεινοῖς κρυπτομένα λόχοις, 490): Clytemnestra and Aegisthus may seem to have escaped punishment so far but the Erinys has simply been biding her time to strike at the most opportune and terrible moment. The style of these verses transcends what we would expect from the Argive women; instead, it shows the hand of the extra-diegetic voice drawing attention to the inevitability of the punishment.

In the second sentence, the style of the description of Clytemnestra’s and Aegisthus’ relationship is similarly intensified. The comment begins with two alpha-privative adjectives in asyndeton (ἄλεκτορ ἄννυφα, ‘accused bed accursed bridal’, literally ‘un-marriage-bed-like un-bridal-like’, 492). This stresses the ‘un’-naturalness of the couple’s lust. Their wedlock (γάμων, 493) is described with another epithet: it is ‘blood-stained’ (μιαιφόνων, 492). Finally, the judgement of the relationship is emphasised by the word order: at the very end of the sentence the *choreutai* sing that it is ‘not right’ (οὐ θέμις, 493). The extra-diegetic voice suggests that Agamemnon was indeed slain ‘in a most shameful outrage’ (αἰσχίσταις ἐν αἰκίαις, 486) and, by implication, that the killing of the Clytemnestra and Aegisthus is right (*themis*).

The use of *themis* (θέμις, 493), right at the end of the sentence, however, acts as a subtle warning. *Themis*, law as established by custom, is

used much more sparingly in the *Electra* than *dikē*, law as fixed by statute.³⁹ The *choreutai* first employed it in the *parados* where they expressed the desire that Agamemnon's killer should perish (126-7). They immediately qualified their wish, however, with the words 'if it is right (*themis*) for me to speak these words' (εἴ μοι θέμις τάδ' αὐδᾶν, 127). March (2001, p. 148) believes that the women are being cautious because Aegisthus and Clytemnestra are the rulers of Mycenae. The royal couple, however, are not present at the conversation, so the Argive women need not be careful. Instead, the rider may reflect the view that monarchs enjoyed a special status, that they were, as Hesiod puts it, 'cherished by Zeus' (διοτρεφέων, *Theogony*, 82).⁴⁰ The use of the term *themis*, then, suggests that, while the relationship between Clytemnestra and Aegisthus is against the customs that regulate marriage, killing them may similarly not be *themis*.

The view that there is a second line of communication, one that actually undermines the surface discourse, is reinforced by the sudden change in content and mood in the epode. The *choreutai* start by apostrophising an event: 'o ride of Pelops long ago, bringer of much trouble' (ὦ Πέλοπος ἃ πρόσθεν / πολύπονός ἱππεία, 503-4). Next, they allude to the death of Myrtilus, 'plunged into the sea' (ποντισθείς, 508) from his chariot. The sketchiness of the discourse allows for the evocation of different versions of the myth.⁴¹ The ride of Pelops refers to the chariot race set up as a bride contest by king Oenomaus for the hand of his daughter. The 'all-golden chariot' (παγχρόσων δίφρων, 510) recalls Pindar's *Olympian* 1.86-7 where the hero wins his bride because Poseidon gives him 'both a golden chariot and untiring horses with wings' (δίφρον

³⁹ *Thēmis* occurs only five times, at 127, 432, 493, 565, 1064.

⁴⁰ As we saw, in the second *kommos* of the *Antigone*, the chorus-leader uses *thēmis* with similar caution when he tells Creon that 'if it is *right* to say so, his ruin came not from others but because he himself erred' (εἰ *thēmis* εἰπεῖν, οὐκ ἄλλοτρίαν / ἄτην, ἀλλ' αὐτὸς ἁμαρτῶν, 1259-60).

⁴¹ See Gantz, 1993, pp. 540-47, for the ancient sources dealing with the myth of Pelops.

τε χούσεον πετροῖσιν τ' ἀκάμαντας ἵππους, 88). Other sources, however, tell that Pelops' victory was due to deceit, his bribery of Myrtilus, Oenomaus' charioteer, who tampered with the linchpin of the king's chariot and so caused an accident that killed his master. 'Plunged into the sea' (ποντισθείς, 508), moreover, evokes the tradition that it was Pelops who hurled Myrtilus 'to his death in the swell of the sea' (φόνον / [...] ἐς οἶδμα πόντου, Euripides, *Orestes*, 989-95) and that the charioteer cursed his killer's family as he fell. At the end of the epode, the *choreutai* sing about the effect of this curse: 'never yet has the outrage of many troubles departed from the house' (οὐ τί πω / ἔλειπεν ἐκ τοῦδ' οἴκου / πολύποντος αἰκεία, 513-15). 'Never yet' (οὐ τί πω, 513) may simply be a reference to the past calamities in Electra's family. With Orestes planning the next kin-killing, however, the wording has an ominous ring: it suggests that the utterance has a proleptic quality and, as Winnington-Ingram (1980) says, this raises the question: 'Will the succession stop now?' (p. 219).⁴²

Let me summarise what we have found out in the first episode and the first *stasimon* about the authoritativeness of the discourse of Electra and the chorus, respectively. First, Chrysothemis' enmity towards Clytemnestra and Aegisthus and the royal couple's plan to incarcerate Electra make the protagonist's information about her miserable life in the palace sound credible. At the same time, however, there are hints that Electra may *deliberately* be making her existence wretched in order publicly to give discomfort to her mother and her lover. It will be necessary, then,

⁴² Of course, unlike in Aeschylus and Euripides, the Erinys does not appear at the end of Sophocles' tragedy. As Roberts, 1988, notes, however, there are regularly 'allusion to other stories' (p. 3) in Sophocles that create an 'equivocal ending' (p. 3). The most notable other instances are in the *Trachiniae*, the *Philoctetes* and the *Oedipus Coloneus*. See also, Hester, 1973.

to examine her future discourse carefully to see whether there are further instances where she distorts the facts.

Secondly, the chorus take Electra's information at face value and, in the first *stasimon*, accept her view of Clytemnestra's nightmare and confidently prophesy the arrival of the Erinyes and the just punishment of Agamemnon's murder. An analysis of the markers of authoritativeness, however, indicates that the discourse is in the mimetic mode of communication: the *choreutai* are singing as an intra-diegetic voice; the trustworthiness of their optimistic pronouncements is low. Moreover, verbal echoes with the prologue and the *parodos* suggest that Orestes is morally tainted and that killing monarchs may not be right. This raises doubts about the chorus's simplistic view of justice. Finally, the reference to Myrtilus introduces dark undertones which signal the possibility that the curse on the house may continue after Agamemnon's murder has been avenged.

4. THE SECOND EPISODE (516-822) AND THE *KOMMOS* (823-70)

The second episode allows us to examine the reliability of Electra's discourse vis-à-vis Clytemnestra while, in the *kommos*, we are again able to compare the protagonist's and the chorus's response side by side.

The scene with the queen confirms that the relationship between mother and daughter is completely dysfunctional and that they are locked in a never-ending cycle of recriminations. Clytemnestra justifies the killing of Agamemnon as *dike*, as 'penalty' (δίκην, 538) for her husband's sacrifice of Iphigeneia. It was, therefore, 'Dike ('Justice') that took him, not I alone' (ἡ [...] Δίκη νιν εἴλεν, οὐκ ἐγὼ μόνη, 528) and, if Electra disagrees with her, the queen concludes, she ought to acquire 'just judgement' (γνώμην δικαίαν, 551). March (2001) writes that, since, in the first *stasimon*, 'the chorus sang triumphantly and convincingly that Justice the avenger was even now advancing to take retribution for Agamemnon's murder, [...]

Clytemnestra's appeal to this same Justice cannot help but cast a shadow of doubt over [her] argument' (p. 174, my italics). As we saw, however, the chorus's discourse was not convincing since the extra-diegetic voice raised questions about a simplistic view of justice.⁴³

Two further issues make the scene ambiguous: first, there are new signs that Electra's utterances are not entirely trustworthy. In her confrontation with her mother, Electra rejects Clytemnestra's appeal to retributive justice saying that Agamemnon sacrificed Iphigeneia because he was forced to do so by Artemis. Clytemnestra's real reason for killing her husband, therefore, in Electra's view, is 'persuasion from of an evil man' (πειθὼ κακοῦ πρὸς ἄνδρός, 562). Moreover, her mother is now committing 'the most shameful deed of all' (αἰσχίστα πάντων ἔργα, 586), 'sleeping with the enemy' (ἐχθροῖς γαμεῖσθαι, 594) and 'casting out' (ἐκβαλοῦσ', 590) the children from her marriage with Agamemnon, privileging instead the new ones she has 'made' (παιδοποιεῖς, 589) with Aegisthus. This last claim is not entirely true, however. As we saw in the *parodos*, the chorus told Electra that her suffering went 'beyond' (περισσά, 155) that of her siblings and, just prior to the *agōn* with her mother, we observed the beautifully dressed Chrysothemis (328ff) who enjoys all the privileges (360) which Electra does without: good clothing, food, a comfortable life (361-2), and freedom (339). Electra, then, presents her own situation as though it applies to all of Agamemnon's children and, since we know that this is not the case, it raises questions about the reliability of her voice.

In the scene between the Paedagogus and Clytemnestra, there is a new instance which undermines Electra's trustworthiness. In the *parodos*,

⁴³ I am not saying that Clytemnestra's killing of Agamemnon is presented as 'just' in Sophocles. The queen, in effect, loses the *agōn* when she is reduced to threatening her daughter that 'you shall not escape the consequences of this insolence when Aegisthus comes' (626-7). As we saw in the *Antigone*, however, Sophocles stages the ethical issues in such a way as to show flaws on both sides. This creates the ambiguity and tension in the choral voice with which I am concerned.

Electra claimed that Clytemnestra was ‘gloating’ (ἐγγελῶσα, 277) over Agamemnon’s killing and that she was so ‘reckless’ (τλήμων, 275) that she ‘lived with the polluter without fearing any Erinys’ (τῷ μιάστορι ξύνεστ’, ἐρινὺν οὔτιν’ ἐκφοβουμένη, 275-6). On hearing of her son’s death, however, Clytemnestra confesses to the Paedagogus that she has constantly been afraid of Orestes’ vengeance ‘so that neither by day nor by night would sweet sleep cover me, but from one moment to another I lived like one about to die’ (ὥστ’ οὔτε νυκτὸς ὕπνον οὔτ’ ἐξ ἡμέρας / ἐμὲ στεγάζειν ἡδύν, ἀλλ’ ὁ προστατῶν / χρόνος διηγέ μ’ αἰὲν ὡς θανουμένην, 780-82).⁴⁴ While the facts presented by Electra are true, the motivation she ascribes to her mother may not be.

After Clytemnestra and the Paedagogus have entered the palace, Electra once more accuses her mother of ‘gloating’ (ἐγγελῶσα, 807, cf. 1153), this time over the death of Orestes. The scene in which the Paedagogus reported the fatal chariot accident, however, was more ambiguous. Clytemnestra’s first reaction was one of confusion: ‘O Zeus, am I to call it fortunate, or terrible, but beneficial? It is painful if I preserve my life by means of my own calamities’ (ὦ Ζεῦ, τί ταῦτα, πότερον εὐτυχῇ λέγω, / ἢ δεινὰ μὲν, κέρδη δέ; λυπηρῶς δ’ ἔχει, / εἰ τοῖς ἐμαυτῆς τὸν βίον σῶζω κακοῖς, 766-68). Finglass (2007) says that ‘this is hardly the reaction of a grief-stricken mother’ (p. 338). Nonetheless, the Paedagogus is surprised (‘Why are you so despondent’, τί δ’ ὦδ’ ἀθυμεῖς, 769): he expected his ‘words’ to be ‘sweet’ (λόγους / ἡδεῖς, 666-7).

Clytemnestra next explains her mixed feeling, saying that ‘giving birth is a strange thing; even when they treat one badly, one does not hate those to whom one has given birth’ (δεινὸν τὸ τίκτειν ἐστίν· οὐδὲ γὰρ κακῶς / πάσχοντι μῖσος ὧν τέκη προσγίγνεται, 770-71). For Waldock (1966) she ‘drops a tear – and notes her emotion with surprise. It is only a

⁴⁴ For Clytemnestra’s constant fears, even before her nightmare, see also 784-6.

passing pang [...]. She smothers it with no trouble. The feeling that floods her being is one of vast relief' (p. 183). Kamerbeek (1974b), on the other hand, comments that 'it will not do to regard Clytemnestra's words as pure hypocrisy. This fleeting moment of her being aware of her tragic situation redeems the poet's creature from absolute inhumanity and unreality' (p. 108). For Kells (1973), finally, the lines constitute 'an enormous reversal in the stage action' (p. 7): here '[Sophocles] transfers our sympathy to [Clytemnestra]' (p. 8). The great divergence in interpretations of this scene shows how ambiguously the discourse has been phrased and how difficult it is to establish the trustworthiness of Electra's discourse, especially since the plural 'one does not hate *those* to whom one has given birth' (ὧν τέκῃ, 771) suggests that Clytemnestra continues to have tender feeling for her daughter.

Let me now turn to the second issue that makes the *Electra* such a disputed play – the repeated suggestion of the continuation of the *lex talionis* – and discuss if it affects the trustworthiness of the protagonist's discourse. Clytemnestra's argumentation that she killed her husband in retaliation for his sacrifice of Iphigeneia evokes the final scenes of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* where the queen similarly justified her murder of her husband (1417-18). She then, however, tried to shift the responsibility away from herself by evoking the earlier kin-killings in the family and calling herself the 'ancient bitter avenging spirit of Atreus' (ὁ παλαιὸς δοῖμὺς ἀλάστωρ / Ἀτρέως, 1501-2). As Raeburn and Thomas (2011) write, this leads 'to a frightened realization that she will have to pay in turn for her own crime' (p. 216) and that, as the *choreutai* state, 'the family is glued to ruin' (κεκόλληται γένος πρὸς ἄτᾱ, 1566).

As we saw, the possibility of this continuation of the vicious cycle of retaliatory murder in Electra's family was already hinted at in the first *stasimon*, by the comment that trouble has '*never yet*' (οὐ τί πῶ, 513) left the house. Now, in the second episode, it is suggested again, this time by

Electra and at greater length: after Clytemnestra's appeal to the 'law' (νόμος, 579) of retribution, the protagonist's reply contains these lines (580-83):

ὄρα τιθεῖσα τόνδε τὸν νόμον βροτοῖς
 μὴ πῆμα σαυτῇ καὶ μετάγνοιαν τιθῆς.
 εἰ γὰρ κτενοῦμεν ἄλλον ἀντ' ἄλλου, σὺ τοι
 πρώτη θάνοις ἄν, εἰ δίκης γε τυγχάνοις.

Take care that in laying down this law for mortals you are not laying down pain and repentance for yourself! For if we take a life for a life, you should die first, if you were to get the penalty you deserve.

Electra warns that, if Agamemnon sacrificed Iphigeneia and Clytemnestra killed her husband in retribution, then the *lex talionis* requires that the queen herself die. 'Taking a life for a life', however, is also what Electra wants her brother to do. The discourse, then, reinforces the dialogic overtones of the Aeschylean tragedy, creating the expectation that, by committing matricide, Orestes himself may be 'laying down pain and repentance' for himself and that the Erinyes will appear at the end of this play, too. Once more, the horizontal and vertical dialogic overtones raise questions about the confidence expressed in the protagonists' and the chorus's surface discourse: the troubles in Electra's family may not end with the murder of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. The fact that Electra does not notice the consequences of her argumentation because of her focus on her father's murderers shows the limitations of her insight and thus makes the authoritativeness of her voice more doubtful.

Let me now discuss the *kommos* performed after Clytemnestra and the Paedagogus have gone into the palace and analyse its effect on the reliability of the discourse. The *choreutai* and the protagonist alternate in

singing short responses to the news that Orestes has been killed in the chariot accident. The exchange consists of two strophic pairs. In the first, the Argive women wonder at the lack of divine reaction to the disaster of Orestes' death, then try to comfort Electra. In the second, they oscillate between echoing Electra's distress and trying to console her by stating that death comes to all mortals.⁴⁵

The entire exchange is in the mimetic mode. One stanza, however, antistrophe A (837-48), stands out because it reaches beyond the immediate context by alluding to the myth of Amphiaraus. The *choreutai* sing that this Argive hero died because of 'the golden necklace of a woman' (χρυσοδέτοις / ἔρκεσι [...] γυναικῶν, 837-8) but that 'below the earth [...] he rules with full power of mind' (καὶ νῦν ὑπὸ γαίης [...] πάμψυχος ἀνάσσει, 842). In myth, Eriphyle, the wife of Amphiaraus, is bribed by Polynices with an heirloom of the family, the necklace of Harmonia. She manages to persuade her husband to take part in the expedition against Thebes although, being a seer, he knows that it is doomed. Before leaving, however, Amphiaraus extracts a promise from his son Alcmaeon that he will avenge him.⁴⁶

Electra dismisses the chorus's paradigm because her own 'champion' (μελέτωρ, 846), Orestes, is dead and so can no longer avenge their father. The audience, however, know from the prologue that Orestes *is* alive and about to avenge his father. He will, then, in fact become like

⁴⁵ In Aeschylus' *Choephoroe*, there is also a *kommos* (306-478), but it is performed by the two siblings and the chorus. Moreover, the context is quite different: Orestes has just revealed himself to his sister and they are now mourning their father together, trying to invoke the help of his spirit in the underworld, and preparing themselves emotionally in order to be able to perform the vengeance. There are none of the verbal or thematic triggers which we will see in my analysis and which I feel are necessary to create dialogic overtones. For a discussion of the Aeschylean *kommos* with bibliography, see Conacher, 1989, pp. 108-13

⁴⁶ See Gantz, 1993, pp. 506-10 and pp. 525-27, for the myth of Amphiaraus, Eriphyle, and their son Alcmaeon. The myth is likely to have been familiar to many spectators: as Gantz says, the confrontation between mother and son must have been narrated by the epic *Alcmaeonis* and by Stesichorus' *Eriphyle*. It may also have been dramatized in Aeschylus' and Sophocles' *Epigonoí*. Finally, Sophocles wrote one, Euripides two, *Alcmaeon* plays.

Amphiaraus' son who punished his mother for causing the death of his father: the *comparandum* foreshadows the *gestalt* of the tragedy. The allusiveness of the reference to Amphiaraus, however, just like that of Myrtilus earlier, allows it to trigger the continuation of the story: Alcmaeon was pursued by his mother's Erinyes after the matricide. By introducing the paradigm of Amphiaraus, then, the extra-diegetic voice creates the expectation that the *lex talionis* may become relevant in this play, too.⁴⁷

Let me sum up what we have learnt from the second episode and the *kommos*. First, the stage action shows that the relationship between Electra and Clytemnestra has indeed broken down, with both mother and daughter caught in a continuous vicious cycle of verbal abuse. This makes Electra's description of her wretched existence in the palace credible. Certain inconsistencies, however, between the conduct and motives she ascribes to her mother and what we have witnessed as part of the action on stage makes it increasingly uncertain that everything Electra says can be taken at face value.

Secondly, both the second episode and the *kommos* set up the expectation that the Erinyes will appear at the end of the play: in the episode, Electra counters her mother's argument that she killed Agamemnon in requital for the sacrifice of Iphigeneia by telling her that this law condemns her, too. This same rule, however, should then also apply to Orestes after the matricide. In the *kommos*, the chorus's allusion to the myth of Amphiaraus suggests that Agamemnon and the seer will be alike, both avenged by their sons. In the mythological and poetic tradition,

⁴⁷ Contra, Stinton, 1990, who says that 'the one most important thing most certainly known about Alcmaeon was that he killed his mother to avenge his father's death through treachery [...]. It is a mistake to see reference outside the function, and tragic audiences would not do so' (p. 474).

however, both young men were pursued by the Erinyes following the matricide, and this suggests that the same may happen in Sophocles, too.

5. THE THIRD EPISODE (871-1057) AND THE SECOND *STASIMON* (1058-97)

The third episode and the second *stasimon* act as mirror scenes to the first *stasimon* and the first episode: after another confrontation with her sister, in which Electra dismisses Chrysothemis' visual evidence of Orestes' arrival and suggests that *they* should kill Aegisthus now their brother is dead, the chorus respond with a solo choral ode in which they unequivocally praise the protagonist.

In many ways, however, the paired scenes are different. First, as far as Electra's potential authoritativeness is concerned, the third episode represents a turning point: the protagonist fails to accept what Chrysothemis has 'seen' (ἰδοῦσα, 885, 887), the grave offerings left by Orestes, over what she herself has 'heard' (εἰσακούσας, 884), the Paedagogus's report of the fatal chariot accident. The audience, however, know that Chrysothemis is right. There are further hints, then, that Electra's susceptibility to deception, despite Orestes' repeated messages (169-71), as well as her tendency to distort some facts, prevents her discourse from being credible.

Secondly, the language of the choral discourse in the second *stasimon* is more oblique than that of the first and, therefore, more difficult to assess: the precise meaning of a number of utterances in the first half of the ode is uncertain. Moreover, in the second part, some details are inconsistent with utterances made earlier by the *coryphaeus*. This, once more, raises questions about the authoritativeness of the surface meaning. Rather than examining the episode and the *stasimon* separately, as I have done so far, I shall go straight to the choral ode and refer back to the quarrel between the two sisters as part of my analysis.

The second *stasimon* consists of two strophic pairs: in strophe and antistrophe A, the *choreutai* wonder why humans, unlike birds, do not take care of their parents. They then ask for a message to reach the Atridae to tell them about the terrible disagreement between the sisters. Finally, they describe Electra's sorrow: she alone laments her father's fate, like the 'all-plaintive nightingale' (πάνδυρτος ἀηδών, 1077), and is even prepared to die, if she can only bring down the 'twin [...] Erinys' (διδύμαν [...] Ἐρινύν, 1080) in the house. In strophe and antistrophe B, the *choreutai* unreservedly praise Electra.

The interpretation of a number of utterances in the first strophic pair is ambiguous. I shall concentrate on two, one from each stanza. The ode begins with the *choreutai* singing about 'birds that are so sensible taking care of those who gave them birth and pleasure' (φρονιμωτάτους οἰωνούς [...] τροφᾶς / κηδομένους ἀφ' ὧν τε βλάστω/σιν ἀφ' ὧν τ' ὄνασιν εὖρ/ωσι, 1058, 1060-62). Most critics agree that they are commenting on the duty that children have towards their parents. In Aristophanes' *Birds*, for instance, we hear about a stork law that requires that 'when the father-stork has reared all his young storks and made them ready to leave the nest, the young birds must, in turn, maintain their father' (ἐπὴν ὁ πατήρ ὁ πελαργὸς ἐκπετησίμους / πάντας ποιήσῃ τοὺς πελαργιδέας τρέφων, / δεῖ τοὺς νεοττοὺς τὸν πατέρα πάλιν τρέφειν, 1353-7). When the *choreutai* ask 'why do we not do the same' (τί [...] τὰδ' οὐκ ἐπ' ἴσας τελοῦμεν, 1062), then, many scholars believe that this is a criticism of Chrysothemis who, in rejecting Electra's plan to kill Aegisthus, is disregarding her obligation towards her murdered father.⁴⁸

Horizontal dialogic overtones reinforce this interpretation. Electra has twice reminded her sister of this duty. The first occurred in their initial encounter in the play where she chided her saying that 'being the

⁴⁸ E.g. Jebb, 1894, p. 144; Kamerbeek, 1974, p. 142; Burton, 1980, p. 209; Gardiner, 1987, p. 154; March, 2001, p. 202; Finglass, 2007, p. 428.

daughter of your father, you forget him and respect the woman who bore you' (δεινόν γέ σ' οὔσαν πατρός οὐ σὺ παῖς ἔφυς,/ κείνου λεληῆσθαι, τῆς δὲ τυκτούσης μέλειν, 341-2); the second was in the episode just gone where, at the end of her speech proposing the murder of Aegisthus, Electra appealed to her sister to 'toil with your father' (συμπόνει πατρί, 986). The choral discourse, then, suggests criticism of Chrysothemis.

The phrasing, however, also allows for a second interpretation: Chrysothemis left the stage with the words 'if you think you are showing some *sense*, show *sense* like that!' (εἰ σεαυτῇ τυγχάνεις δοκοῦσά τι / φρονεῖν, φρόνει τοιαῦθ', 1055-6). When the chorus sing about birds that are 'so *sensible*' (φρονιμωτάτους, 1060), therefore, the repetition of a word from the 'sense' (φρον-) root may in fact be showing their agreement with Chrysothemis and, by implication, their criticism of Electra.⁴⁹ Indeed, a comparison with the Aristophanean intertext supports this reading: there, the parent bird is described as 'the stork-father' (ὁ πατήρ ὁ πελαργός). In the second *stasimon* of the *Electra*, however, the *choreutai* sing about parents in the plural: 'those who give life and pleasure' (ἀφ' ὧν τε βλάστωσιν ἀφ' ὧν τ' ὄνασιν εὖρ/ωσι, lit. 'those from whom they spring forth and from whom they find enjoyment'). So, if Chrysothemis is neglecting one parent (her father), then Electra is also unmindful of a parent (her mother).⁵⁰

Earlier passages support this reading: in the *parodos*, Electra twice used the plural 'parents' when, on the surface, she was only speaking about her father: in antistrophe A, she sang 'foolish is he who forgets the piteous end of *parents*' (νήπιος ὃς τῶν οἰκτρῶς / οἰχομένων γονέων ἐπιλάθεται, 144-5), in the epode 'may I never enjoy honour [...] if I restrain the wings of loud lamentation, not showing the honour due to *parents*' (μήτ' [...] / ξυνναίοιμ' εὐκηλος, γονέων / ἐκτίμους ἴσχουσα

⁴⁹ Cf. Kells, 1973, p. 180.

⁵⁰ Cf. Winnington-Ingram, 1980, pp. 244-5.

πτέρυγας / ὀξύτόνων γόων, 240-3). March (2001) believes that these are 'generalising plurals' (p. 154), but later Electra herself admits her failings towards her mother: in the first episode, she apologises to the chorus for her behaviour, telling them that, 'when things are so, my friends, there can be no good sense or piety' (ἐν οὖν τοιούτοις οὔτε σωφρονεῖν, φίλοι, / οὔτ' εὐσεβεῖν πάρεστιν, 307-8). Later, in the second episode, she even admits to Clytemnestra that she feels 'shame' (αἰσχύνην, 616) at her behaviour and that she knows that 'my actions are unseemly for my age and unfitting' (ἔξωρα πράσσω κούκ ἐμοὶ προσεϊκότα, 618). Electra recognises that she owes her mother respect but, since in her world a person can only be *either* an enemy *or* a friend, depending on their attitude to Agamemnon, this is impossible.⁵¹ The reference to the wisdom of the birds at the start of the ode, then, is phrased in such a way as to allow for two, diametrically opposed, interpretations, each supported by dialogic overtones with earlier scenes.

Antistrophe A can similarly be understood in two ways, and here, as earlier in the play, the discourse suggests that the cycle of kin-killing may not stop with Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. The *choreutai* praise Electra for her readiness to face death 'if she can bring down the *twin Erinys*' (διδύμαν ἑλοῦσ' Ἐρινύν, 1080). We have already noted earlier references to the Erinys: in her monody, Electra prayed to this chthonic power when asking for help to punish the murderers of her father (111-14) and, in the first *stasimon*, the *choreutai* predicted that Clytemnestra's dream showed that the Erinys was about to appear. So far, then, this avenging entity has been portrayed as helping to punish the murderers of Agamemnon.

Here, however, as Jebb (1894, p. 147) says, the 'twin Erinys' refers to Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, that is, to two characters who are still alive

⁵¹ Cf. Friis Johansen, 1959: 'Die Pflicht ihrem Vater gegenüber zwingt sie, die εὐσέβεια, die sie ihrer Mutter schuldig ist, zu verletzen (p. 13).'

and who were responsible for the king's death. Finglass (2007, p. 432) explains this by saying that Sophocles' *Electra* is not the only play in which living figures are called Erinys: Helen is thus named by the chorus in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* (749) and by Cassandra in Euripides' *Troades* (457), while in the *Medea* the protagonist, who is about to murder her own children, is called Erinys by the chorus (1260). The reference would, then, be an indication of the wickedness of the royal couple and an implied endorsement by the chorus of Electra's murder plan.

On the other hand, the evocation of the Erinys with a focus on the murderers rather than the victim is a reminder of Clytemnestra's claim that she herself acted as an *avenger* when she murdered Agamemnon: as we saw, in her *rhēsis* she claimed that she killed her husband in retaliation for his sacrifice of Iphigeneia. Because of the Aeschylean intertext and Electra's warning of the implications of the *lex talionis*, however, the discourse of the *kommos* also set up the expectation that Orestes might be hounded after the next round of kin-killing. When now, in the second *stasimon*, the queen and her lover are called the 'twin Erinys', this hints at this possibility again: it will be the monarchs' Erinys that will set off the next cycle of violence. Again, however, the discourse is phrased in such a way as to allow for two, entirely opposite, interpretations, one optimistic, the other pessimistic: Electra, Orestes, and the Argive women ignore the possible consequences of the murder of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus; the dialogic overtones, however, constantly problematise their simplistic view.

Let me now turn to the second strophic pair in which the *choreutai* unreservedly praise Electra. It is easier to understand because it is clearly a comment on the action of the third episode. The chorus echo the protagonist's arguments, twice the very wording she used in her attempt to convince Chrysothemis that they should kill Aegisthus: Electra claimed that she and Chrysothemis would acquire 'fame' (εὐκλειαν, 973; κλέος,

985) by killing Aegisthus and, in the second *stasimon*, the *choreutai* commend her for not wishing to ‘tarnish her *fame* by a miserable life without glory’ (ζῶν κακῶς εὐκλειαν αἰσχῦναι [...] / νόνημος, 1083-4). Electra also told Chrysothemis that they would be praised for their ‘piety’ (εὐσέβειαν, 968; σέβειν, 981) and this, too, is echoed by the chorus: at the end of the *stasimon*, they applaud her for her ‘piety towards Zeus’ (τᾷ Ζηνὸς εὐσεβείᾳ, 1097). Finally, Electra argued that what is ‘just’ (δίκη, 1041) must be performed regardless of the consequences, and now the *choreutai* praise her for being ‘morally good’ (ἀγαθῶν, 1082). Many scholars believe that Electra has converted the Argive women to her point of view:⁵² they now approve of all of her actions, not only her ‘all-tearful life’ (πάγκλαυτον αἰῶνα, 1085-6), her continuous lament for Agamemnon, but also her plan to kill Aegisthus. Indeed, the *choreutai* even appropriate the simile which Electra employed for herself at the beginning of the play (107, 147): they themselves now liken her to ‘the ever-grieving nightingale’ (ἄ πάνδυρτος ἀηδών, 1077).

This sudden praise, however, is odd because, in the episode just gone, the chorus-leader was less enthusiastic: when Electra first proposed her plan to Chrysothemis, whilst not actually rejecting it, she advised the sisters to display ‘foresight’ (προμηθία, 990-91). Chrysothemis herself dismissed Electra’s suggestion on the grounds that it was likely to result, not in glory, but in their ‘dying ignobly’ (δυσκλεῶς θανεῖν, 1006). She, therefore, told her sister to display ‘good sense’ (φρενῶν, 992; νοῦν, 1013; cf. 1023, 1027, 1056). The *coryphaeus* again echoed this implied criticism of Electra when she said that ‘there is no greater profit for human beings than *foresight* and *wise thinking*’ (προνοίας οὐδὲν ἀνθρώποις ἔφν / κέρδος λαβεῖν ἄμεινον οὐδὲ νοῦ σοφοῦ, 1015-16). Now in the *stasimon*, however, the *choreutai* suddenly praise Electra for not ‘caring about dying’ (θανεῖν

⁵² E.g. Winnington-Ingram, 1980, p. 241; Ierulli, 1993, p. 224; March, 2001, p. 202.

προμηθής, literally for not ‘forethinking dying’, 1078), and call her a ‘daughter most wise and noble’ (σοφά τ’ ἀρίστα τε παῖς, 1089). The women’s sudden volte-face is puzzling: as Finglass (2007) notes ‘nothing in the interval could motivate this change on realistic grounds’ (p. 427).⁵³ It can be explained, however, if we examine the level on which the communication takes place.

With *Electra* present, the Argive women address her directly (‘o child, child’, ὦ παῖ παῖ, 1084). They also employ a number of first and second-person pronouns and verbs (pronouns: μοι, ‘for me’, 1090; σύ, σ’, ‘you’, 1085, 1093; verbs: ἐφηύρηκα, ‘I have found’, 1093; ναίεις, ‘you live’, 1092). The discourse signals that they are acting as an intra-diegetic voice who are involved in the action: their praise of their friend, then, occurs on the lowest level of authoritativeness. The first strophic pair, however, was different: it suggested the intrusion of the extra-diegetic voice, and the chorus’s support for the protagonist there was phrased in such a way as to make it ambiguous.

Let me again sum up what we have found out from the third episode and the second *stasimon*. First, in the quarrel between the sisters, the *coryphaeus* advises caution with regard to *Electra*’s plan to kill Aegisthus. In the second *stasimon*, however, the choral response is more ambiguous: in the first two stanzas of the ode, the oblique language makes the precise meaning of the discourse uncertain. This allows for two separate interpretations, one optimistic, approving *Electra*’s continued lament for

⁵³ Finglass concludes that ‘dramatic necessity has taken precedence over consistency of character. [...] *Electra* will shortly deliver her great lament over the urn and for this to be as emotionally affecting as possible the audience must have a more favourable attitude towards her than would have been possible during the third episode’ (p. 427). Kitto, 1933, also draws attention to these inconsistencies but he suggests that ‘we ought perhaps to infer that, in the theatre, the chorus-leader acting as a minor character, as an individual, was so visibly distinct from the chorus-leader leading his fourteen colleagues in dance and song that no feeling of inconsistency arose’ (p. 170).

Agamemnon and her plan to kill Aegisthus, the other more pessimistic, raising questions about her focus on her dead father and her failure to respect her mother. Moreover, the reference to the Erinyes again creates the expectation that Orestes will be hounded by them after the matricide.

In the second strophic pair, the *choreutai* unreservedly praise Electra's determination to see her father avenged. The discourse here, then, is inconsistent with the utterance of the *coryphaeus* in the third episode. This prompts the question if the discourse can be read at face value. An examination of the level of communication, in fact, reveals that the Argive women are performing *qua* stage figure, and this reduces the authoritativeness of their discourse.

6. THE FOURTH EPISODE (1098-1383) AND THE THIRD *STASIMON* (1098-1383)

In the fourth episode, Electra finally comes face to face with Orestes. He carries the urn that supposedly contains his ashes and, since Electra does not recognise him, she breaks into an emotional lament. This so affects Orestes that he finally reveals himself. Shortly afterwards, the siblings enter the palace together to prepare for the revenge act. In response to the deed to come, the *choreutai* sing the third *stasimon*. As in the previous two odes, the Argive women as a stage figure completely approve of the killings. The discourse, however, contains threatening undertones which, ultimately, make its interpretation ambiguous.

In terms of the potential authoritativeness of Electra's voice, the fourth episode is important in two respects: first, the urn speech (1126-70) once more raises questions about the protagonist's portrayal of Clytemnestra. Secondly, Electra's passionate reaction to Orestes' news, makes it uncertain whether she is able rationally and objectively to evaluate any situation. Let me start with the urn speech.

Electra begins by addressing the casket that contain the only 'remaining memorial of Orestes' life' (μνημεῖον / [...] ψυχῆς Ὀρέστου

λοιπόν, 1126-7) and remembers how she saved her brother by having him sent into exile when Agamemnon was murdered. Now, however, he has died in a foreign land and she has not even been able to prepare him for burial 'with loving hands' (ἐν φίλαισι χερσίν, 1138). Next, she says that it was she, rather than Clytemnestra or the women in the palace, who nursed him. She delighted in this 'sweet labour' (πόνῳ γλυκεῖ, 1145), and the child called her both 'nurse' (τροφός, 1147) and 'sister' (ἀδελφή, 1148). The description evokes Cilissa's tender speech in Aeschylus' *Choephoroe* (749-60) in which the nurse similarly recounts how she looked after baby Orestes, performing 'twofold handicrafts' (διπλᾶς [...] χειρωναξίας, 761), as 'laundry woman and nurse' (γναφεὺς τροφεύς τε, 760). The dialogic overtones lend credibility to Electra's words.

The next claim, however, raises doubts whether Electra's discourse is entirely trustworthy. She again asserts that 'our enemies are laughing; our evil mother (literally 'our non-mother mother') is mad with pleasure' (γελῶσι δ' ἐχθροί· μαίνεται δ' ὑφ' ἡδονῆς / μήτηρ ἀμήτωρ, 1153-4). As we saw, however, Clytemnestra's reaction to the Paedagogus' news was more ambiguous, and the expression 'mad with pleasure' (μαίνεται δ' ὑφ' ἡδονῆς, 1153) is almost certainly an exaggeration. This makes the veracity of Electra's portrayal of her mother uncertain.

Let me now turn to the language of the speech. Throughout, the style is high and, particularly at the end, there is an accumulation of the sort of poetic devices which, in Electra's monody, suggested the intrusion of the meta- and extra-diegetic voice. I shall quote the last ten lines in full (1160-70):

οἶμοι μοι.

— ∪ ∪ — — — —

ὦ δέμας οἰκτρὸν. φεῦ φεῦ.

— — ∪ ∪ — — —

ὦ δεινοτάτας, οἶμοι μοι,
 πεμφθεὶς κελεύθους, φίλταθ', ὥς μ' ἀπώλεσας·
 ἀπώλεσας δῆτ', ὦ κασίγνητον κάρα.
 τοιγὰρ σὺ δέξαι μ' ἐς τὸ σὸν τόδε στέγος,
 τὴν μηδὲν εἰς τὸ μηδέν, ὥς σὺν σοὶ κάτω
 ναίω τὸ λοιπόν· καὶ γὰρ ἡνίκ' ἦσθ' ἄνω,
 ξὺν σοὶ μετείχον τῶν ἴσων, καὶ νῦν
 τοῦ σοῦ θανοῦσα μὴ ἀπολείπεσθαι τάφου.
 τοὺς γὰρ θανόντας οὐχ ὀρῶ λυπουμενούς.

Alas! Pitiable corpse, oh, oh. You who have travelled on a most terrible path, alas, dearest one, how you have destroyed me! Yes, you have destroyed me, my dear brother! Therefore do you receive me into this chamber of yours, receive me who am nothing into nothingness, so that in future I may live with you below. Yes, for when you were above, I shared your fate, and now I desire to die and not to be excluded from your tomb; for I see that the dead suffer no pain.

The iambic trimeter pattern of the rest of the urn speech is suddenly disrupted by an *extra metrum* cry ('alas', οἶμοι μοι, 1160). Further exclamations of grief in the next two lines indicate the heroine's despair ('oh, oh', φεῦ φεῦ, 1161; 'alas', οἶμοι μοι 1162). The rhythm here changes to anapaests,⁵⁴ and the catalexis at the end of 1162 suggests that they may be melic anapaests and that Electra breaks into song as she addresses the 'pitiable corpse'⁵⁵ (ὦ δέμας οἰκτρὸν, 1161) and the 'most terrible path' (ὦ δεινοτάτας [...] κελεύθους) that Orestes has travelled. The repetition of the word 'you destroyed' (ἀπώλεσας, 1163, 1164), both in emphatic

⁵⁴ See Goldhill, 2012, especially pp. 90-108, on the effect of changes of metre, or what he calls 'slippages of song'. Although his discussion is about the choral lyrics and so not about this particular scene, it is also relevant to Electra's urn speech.

⁵⁵ See again West, 1982, pp.121-2 for the markers of melic or sung anapaest.

position, at the start and end of their lines, reinforces her declaration that the death of the 'dearest one' (φίλταθ', 1163), her 'dear brother' (ὦ κασίγνητον κάρα, 1164), has destroyed her life. Next, Electra's desire to join Orestes 'in this chamber of yours' (ἐς τὸ σὸν τόδε στέγος, 1165) is emphasised by an unusually large number of mono-syllabic words (σύ, μ', ἐς, τό, σόν, 1165) which make for a staccato, sob-like, sound.⁵⁶ The polyptoton in the expression 'nothingness into nothingness' (τὴν μηδὲν εἰς τὸ μηδέν, 1166) further intensifies the pathos of the scene. Finally, with her wish that in death (θανοῦσα, 1169) she may not to be excluded from her brother's tomb since the dead suffer no pain (τοὺς γὰρ θανόντας οὐχ [...] λυπουμενούς, 1170), the speech reaches its emotional climax, and this is again emphasised by a polyptoton ('in death', θανοῦσα, literally 'dying', 1169; 'the dead', τοὺς [...] θανόντας, literally 'those who have died', 1170). The elevated style of the speech certainly emphasises the skill of the composer of the verses. The question, however, is whether the intensified language makes the discourse authoritative.

Reinhardt (1979) compares Electra's urn speech with Teucer's lament in the *Ajax* and says that there 'the centre of gravity lies in the person who grieves: in Ajax's death Teucer laments his own fate' (p. 157).

⁵⁶ The accentuation of the entire passage is striking, and may tell us something about the performance of the actor and even the pitch of his voice. As I just said, line 1165 has an unusually large number of very short, mono- or disyllabic words, and this results in a high incidence of grave accents. According to Dionysus of Halicarnassus (*De Compositione*, 11.58-62), the pitch of the actor's voice may have fallen on these syllables. In the final five lines the number of grave accents remains high but there is also a large number of words with a circumflex accent. Fragments of ancient Greek music (cf. West, 1992) show that such syllables were often split between two notes, with the second regularly of a lower pitch than the first. Overall, then, the actor's voice may have followed a falling trajectory to match the protagonist's despair. The effect of the grave and circumflex accents would be even greater if Electra's words were not spoken but sung. It is true, she switches back to iambic trimeters (rather than lyric iambs) after the two anapaestic lines (1161-2) but, as Goldhill, 2012, says, there may be 'more flexibility and experimentation with the lyric voice than is customarily allowed' (p. 108). Stanford, 1981, pp. 136-7, notes a similarly high incidence of grave accents in the central lines of Ajax's so-called 'deception speech' (669-77). He, too, suggests that these may have affected the actor's delivery. See Cosgrove and Meyer, 2006, for a discussion of the pitch height rule.

In the *Electra*, however, Reinhardt continues, 'the pathos [...] makes its way over to the other person, [...] her words [...] seize him, penetrate and shatter him' (pp. 157-8). Certainly, Electra's words are so powerful that they induce Orestes to reveal himself. This is different, however, from the monody where her grief was presented in a more detached and abstract manner, as viewed from outside. Here, the lament is entirely subjective and personal: apart from the poetic language, the discourse displays none of the other markers of the meta-diegetic voice, nor does it show any knowledge and understanding that goes beyond what we would expect from Electra as a stage figure. More importantly perhaps, the audience know that the heroine need not mourn her brother at all since he is standing right beside her, preparing to avenge their father. Kitzinger (1991), therefore, argues that the urn speech robs Electra's words of 'objective meaning' and that 'there could be no more effective way for Sophocles to undermine [her] power' (p. 323). The intensification of language, then, reflects Electra's emotional turmoil; it does not infuse her discourse with authoritativeness.

The scene that follows the urn speech raises doubts about Electra's judgement in more general terms since we witness another example of her inability to control her emotions. As we saw in the *parodos*, the *choreutai* criticised her for her lack of 'moderation' (140) and pointed out that this made her suffer 'beyond' (περισσά, 155) what her siblings had to bear. Now, after their emotional reunion, Orestes echoes this sentiment when he confesses that 'I am afraid of your *excessive* surrender to delight' (σ' [...] δέδουκα λίαν ἡδονῇ νικωμένην, 1271-2). Instead, he advises her to let go of 'superfluous words' (τὰ [...] περισσεύοντα τῶν λόγων, literally words that go *beyond* what is necessary, 1288) and suggests that they concentrate on the deed to be performed.

This call to action is further emphasised by the Paedagogus, who suddenly appears from the palace to reproach the siblings for their 'long

speeches and insatiate cries of delight’ (τῶν μακρῶν λόγων / καὶ τῆς ἀπλήστου τῆσδε σὺν χαρᾷ βοῆς 1335-6) and warns them that ‘delay is dangerous’ (τὸ μὲν μέλλειν κακὸν / [...] ἔστ’, 1337-8). Even then, however, Electra breaks into an extended, exuberant speech (1354-63) to the ‘only saviour of the house of Agamemnon’ (μόνος σωτὴρ δόμων / Ἀγαμέμνωνος, 1354-5). Whether in grief, hatred or joy, Electra does not restrain her emotions, and this raises doubts if we can really trust her to evaluate difficult situations in an objective manner.⁵⁷

After the conspirators have gone into the palace, the chorus sing the short third *stasimon*: in the strophe, they imagine Ares advancing, ‘engendering blood’ (αἶμα φυσῶν, 1385), now that the ‘inescapable hounds’ (ἄφυκτοι κύνες, 1388) have entered the palace ‘as avengers for evil acts of villainy’ (μετάδρομοι κακῶν πανουργημάτων, 1387). In the antistrophe, they give the reason for their vision: ‘the crafty champion of those below’ (ἐνέρων / δολιόπους ἀρωγός, 1391-2) is entering the palace with ‘newly-whetted blood on his hands’ (νεακόνητον αἶμα χειροῖν, 1394). In his deed, they sing, he has the assistance of Hermes ‘hiding the deceit in darkness’ (δόλον σκότῳ / κρύψας, 1396-7). In both stanzas, the chorus are convinced that the coming bloodshed has divine support, not only that of Ares but also of Hermes.

As we have repeatedly seen, however, the chorus’s authoritativeness depends on the level of their communication. Let us, then, again examine the relevant markers.

The *stasimon* begins with the imperative ‘see’ (ἴδεθ’, 1384) and ends with the hope that ‘the vision of *my* mind’ (τοῦμὸν φρενῶν ὄνειρον, 1390) will soon be accomplished. The verb form and the possessive adjective act as a strong mimetic signal: the *choreutai* are not commenting *qua* chorus

⁵⁷ Friis Johansen, 1959, interprets the scene differently: ‚[Hier] dominiert zum ersten und letzten Mal nicht die hassende und rachsüchtige, sondern die liebende Elektra‘ (p. 23).

and what, on the surface, may sound like a proleptic utterance made by the extra-diegetic voice, is actually the personal wish of the Argive women as a stage figure. The discourse, then, is not necessarily authoritative: the optimism of the surface meaning may be misplaced.

Horizontal and vertical overtones also hint at something darker. First, the Argive women sing that the 'inescapable hounds' (ἄφυκτοι κύνες, 1398) are entering the palace 'pursuing evil acts of villainy' (μετάδρομοι κακῶν πανουργημάτων, 1387). These hounds are, of course, a metaphor for Orestes and Pylades who are taking revenge on Clytemnestra and Aegisthus for their crime committed against Agamemnon. The wording, however, again echoes Aeschylus' *Choephoroe* where, just before her death, Clytemnestra warns Orestes to 'beware your mother's wrathful hounds' (φύλαξαι μητρὸς ἐγκότους κύνας, 924). Euripides uses the same image in his *Electra*: at the end of the play, Castor tells Orestes to 'depart, fleeing from these hounds' (κύνας / τάσδ' ὑποφεύγων στεῖχ', 1342). While the Argive women are singing about the hounds as champions of Agamemnon, the discourse with its echoes of other tragedies once more creates the expectation that Clytemnestra's 'hounds', the Erinyes pursuing kin-murderers, will appear here, too.

Secondly, the antistrophe emphasises the use of *dolos* (deceit, cunning): at the start of the stanza, the *choreutai* call Orestes 'deceit-footed' (δολιόπους, 1392), while at the end they sing that Hermes hides the 'deceit' (δόλον, 1396). *Dolos* is one of the main themes of the play: it was first mentioned in the prologue, in Orestes' report that Apollo ordered him 'secretly to execute by *deceit* the righteous slaughters' (δόλοισι κλέψαι [...] ἐνδίκους σφαγάς, 37). Throughout the play, we have witnessed how the deceit plot has gradually been put into place, first with the Paedagogus' report of Orestes' death and his entry into the palace, now with the appearance of Orestes carrying the urn which will gain him access to his mother and so a chance to kill her.

The use of *dolos*, however, has another side. As both Electra and the chorus have repeatedly mentioned, Clytemnestra and Aegisthus also used deceit and cunning to murder Agamemnon: in the *parodos*, the *choreutai* agreed that Electra's father was killed 'by a plot through your mother's *cunning*' (ἐκ δολεργᾶς ἀθεώτατα / ματρὸς, 124-5) and, as we saw, a little later they stated that '*cunning* was the teacher, passion the killer' (δόλος ἦν ὁ φράσας, ἔρος ὁ κτείνας, 197). Electra also stressed the use of *dolos* (ἐκ δόλου, 279) in Clytemnestra's killing of her husband. Deceit and cunning, then, the discourse suggest, are the preferred *modus operandi* of both parties. This, ultimately, makes it ambiguous if Orestes' murder of his mother, by means of *dolos*, is more justified than Clytemnestra's assassination of her husband, also by means of *dolos*.⁵⁸

Finally, both stanzas stress the spilling of the blood that is about to occur in the palace. This contrasts with the more clinical way in which murders have been described so far: even when Electra and the chorus gave graphic descriptions of Agamemnon's violent death (97-99, 193-6), there was no mention of the gore that must have resulted from the blows of the axe. Now, however, the discourse stresses the coming blood-bath with two images: Ares 'engendering blood' (αἶμα φυσῶν, 1385) and Orestes entering the palace with 'newly-whetted blood on his hands' (νεακόνητον αἶμα χειροῖν, 1394). Burton says about the second expression that it is 'highly impressionistic: by a forward leap of imagination the result of the deed is seen before it is done' (p. 217). This briefly draws our attention away from the avengers on to the victims, subtly altering the focus of the death scene to come.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ The avengers' use of *dolos* is, of course, vindicated by Apollo's command; we saw, however, that Orestes' deceit plan actually goes beyond what the god ordered.

⁵⁹ We saw how Sophocles uses the same technique in the *Philoctetes* when he invokes pity for the warrior in the diegetic passages of the choral discourse, thus prompting questions about the Odyssean plot which takes no account of the prey's humanity.

Let me sum up what we have found out from the fourth episode and the third *stasimon*. First, it is becoming increasingly unlikely that Electra is the *locus* of authoritativeness in the play: not only does she not possess any special insight, the trustworthiness of her discourse is again uncertain because of her bias against her mother. Secondly, although the language of her discourse is highly elevated, the stylistic intensification is a sign of her emotional state, not of her authoritativeness. Finally, the recognition scene demonstrates that her joy is as excessive as her grief and that her lack of moderation is actually endangering the success of the entire revenge act. Her over-emotional response makes it unlikely that her judgement can be trusted.

As far as the chorus are concerned, they sing the third *stasimon* as an intra-diegetic voice, and this means that the communication takes place on the lowest level of authoritativeness. Moreover, dialogic overtones with Aeschylus, Euripides, and earlier passages within the play, problematise the optimism of the Argive women: first, the use of *dolos* by both parties suggests that all the members of the family are alike in employing treachery. This makes it ambiguous if one act of violence is more justifiable than another. Secondly, the emphasis on the gore involved in the revenge act raises questions about the matricide itself. This, too, makes it uncertain if a pursuit of the *lex talionis* over generations is actually defensible. The reference to the inescapable hounds, then, again creates the expectation that the Erinyes may eventually make an appearance in this play, too.

7. THE LYRIC EXCHANGE (1398-1441)

Instead of having a messenger report the death of the queen in *diegesis* as, for instance, in the *Antigone* (Antigone and Haemon, 1192-1243), the *Trachiniae* (Deianeira, 899-946), and the *Oedipus Tyrannus* (Jocasta, 1237-

85),⁶⁰ Clytemnestra's killing is presented in a lyric exchange between the chorus and Electra. A messenger speech would give the audience an entirely trustworthy account of the killing.⁶¹ This lyric conversation, however, takes place between two entities whose authoritativeness has become increasingly uncertain. Let me start by giving the usual brief overview before analysing the discourse in more detail.

The lyric exchange consists of a single pair of stanzas: in the strophe, Electra and the chorus are present on-stage, listening to, and commenting on, the matricide as it takes place in the palace, while Clytemnestra is heard off-stage, unsuccessfully pleading for mercy from Orestes.⁶² In the antistrophe, Pylades and Orestes appear from the house, and the two siblings briefly discuss the deed. The men return to the palace to prepare for the next killing when the Argive women warn them that Aegisthus is approaching.

Throughout the entire scene, both the siblings and the chorus are optimistic about the matricide. One line of communication, then, presents the killing as entirely justified. As we have repeatedly seen in this play, however, the surface meaning of the discourse is made ambiguous by questions raised about the true authoritativeness of utterances and by dialogic undertones from inside and outside the tragedy. Let me start once more by discussing the mode and levels of communication.

First, the action is 'shown' throughout: the mode is mimetic. Secondly, all of Electra's utterances take place on the lowest level of

⁶⁰ I have not included the messenger's report of Eurydices' death in the *Antigone* (1282-1316) because it is made in mimesis, in an exchange between Creon and the messenger.

⁶¹ Cf. Barrett, 2002, on the authoritativeness of messenger speeches.

⁶² Clytemnestra is not killed on-stage since, in the Greek theatre, violent actions were not usually represented directly. The queen's death, however, is made more realistic because its impact is 'shown', first aurally, through Electra's running commentary, then visually, through Orestes' bloody hands. This makes her killing almost as immediate as if it were performed on-stage. Cf. Euripides' *Medea* where the killing of the children, in strophe B of the fifth *stasimon* (1270-81), is made more chilling when the murder victims who are off-stage beg the chorus who are in the *orchēstra* to come to their aid.

communication: despite the highly emotive situation, there is none of the intensification of style that we noted in the *parodos* or even the urn speech. Her discourse, then, is not infused with the authoritativeness of the extra-diegetic voice.

Several of the utterances of the *choreutai*, however, are different: they contain judgements which stand out for the sudden elevation of style, the disruption of the regular iambic trimeter rhythm,⁶³ and a more impersonal manner of phrasing. This suggests that they are taking place on a higher plane. I shall concentrate on two because they demonstrate how the murder scene is made ambiguous by focusing our attention on the victim and by creating dialogic overtones that subtly raise doubts about the positive vision of the future suggested by the primary line of communication.

The first utterance I would like to discuss occurs at the very beginning of the lyric exchange: Electra has just told the chorus that Clytemnestra is preparing the urn for burial with Orestes and Pylades standing by. Now we suddenly hear the queen call out in fear as she realises that the house is 'empty of friends but full of killers' (στέγαι / 1405 φίλων ἔρημοι, τῶν δ' ἀπολλύντων πλέαι, 1404-5). Electra's response is impersonal: 'someone inside is shouting out' (βοᾷ τις ἔνδον, 1407). She repeats the comment three lines later: 'see, again someone is crying out' (ἰδοὺ μάλ' αὖ θροεῖ τις, 1410). 'Someone' (τις) dehumanises the murder victim and plays down the significance of the matricide.

The reaction of the *choreutai*, however, is different: 'I heard sounds that should not be heard, wretched, to make me shudder' (ἤκουσ'

⁶³ Although the responsion between strophe and antistrophe suggests that the entire exchange is sung, the use of iambic trimeters in the dialogue sections hints at a style of performance that may approximate speaking. Only the choral comments in syncopated iambs or dactyl-epitrite might, then, be sung. Cf. *Ajax*, 879-973, the *kommos* between Tecmessa and the chorus after their discovery of the dead Ajax: Tecmessa's iambic trimeter lines are likely to be spoken while the chorus's utterances in lyric metres are sung.

ἀνήκουστα δύστανος, ὥστε φοῖξαι, 1405), they sing. The sudden change to a syncopated, irregular rhythm mirrors the physical reaction of the singers ('shudder', φοῖξαι, 1405). Moreover, the oxymoron 'heard / not [...] heard' (ἤκουσ' ἀνήκουστα) draws attentions to the magnitude of the deed and acts as a possible reminder of the *parodos* where, as we saw, the women qualified their wish for the monarchs' demise with the words 'if it is right for me to speak these words' (εἴ μοι θέμις τάδ' αὐδᾶν, 127). The focus of attention is suddenly on the queen, and the spectator is provided with two extreme responses to the matricide: satisfaction that a hated person is finally being punished and horror at the murder of a monarch and fellow human being. Burton (1980, p. 219) and March (2001, p. 222) believe that the utterance of the chorus does not imply any pity: the matricide is terrible but necessary. Finglass (2007), on the other hand, says that 'it contributes to the disturbing atmosphere which pervades the strophe' (p. 514). In the end, each spectator has to come to their own conclusion.

The second choral comment is much longer and straddles the end of the strophe and the beginning of the antistrophe. Off-stage, Clytemnestra has just appealed to Orestes to 'have pity on the woman who brought you into the world' (οἴκτιξε τὴν τεκοῦσαν, 1411), while, on-stage, Electra has repudiated this plea, stating that Orestes 'did not receive any pity from you, nor the father who begot him' (οὐκ ἐκ σέθεν / ὠκτίξεθ' οὗτος οὐδ' ὁ γεννήσας πατήρ). Then, as her mother screams twice more, struck by Orestes, Electra expresses the wish that he hit her twice as hard and Aegisthus, too. The *choreutai* now sing the following comment (1417-23):

Strophe: τελοῦσ' ἀραί· ζῶσιν οἱ
 γὰρ ὑπαὶ κείμενοι.
 παλίσρυντον γὰρ αἶμ' ὑπεξαίρουσι τῶν κτανόντων

οἱ πάλαι θανόντες.

Antistrophe: καὶ μὴν πάρεισιν οἶδε· φοινία δὲ χεῖρ
στάζει θυηλῆς Ἄρεος, οὐδ' ἔχω ψέγειν.

Strophe: The curses are at work: alive are those who lie beneath the
ground. For the blood of the killers flows backwards,
drained in retaliation for those who died long ago.

Antistrophe: But here they come! A murderous hand drips with a
sacrifice to Ares, and I cannot find fault with it.

In the strophe, the style is impersonal and highly intensified. The first clause is short and to the point ('the curses are at work', τελοῦσ' ἀραί, 1419): the *choreutai* are confident that the curses are using Orestes as their instrument. The next sentence is longer ('alive are those who lie beneath the ground', ζῶσιν οἱ γὰρ ὑπὰὶ κείμενοι, 1418): here, the predominance of vowels and diphthongs (ῶ, ᾱ; οἶ, αῖ, εἰ, οἰ), combined with the regularity of the cretics (—υ— —υ— —υ—), creates an almost incantatory verse,⁶⁴ as if the slumbering victims in the underworld have only just been brought to life to supervise the deed. The third sentence is longer still and even more intensified. The subject, 'those who died long ago' (οἱ πάλαι θανόντες, 1420) is delayed to the end and stressed by a clausular rhythm (—υ— υ— —). This places great emphasis on the ultimate agent behind the curses: the victims of kin-killing. The verb, with its double prefix (ὑπεξ-αιροῦσι, literally 'from below-out-they take', 1419), and the compound adjective qualifying the noun 'blood' (παλίρρυντον, literally 'backwards-flowing', 1419), hint at the sinister power of those in the underworld: they are able to suck out the blood of their killers from below, making it flow

⁶⁴ Cf. Katz, 2013, on the importance of vowels in cultic contexts. He writes that 'strings of vowels in *voces magicae* are employed in divine invocations throughout the wider Mediterranean world, as in the near-palindrome ιεο υηω· ιαη ηωυ οει' (PGM IV.1130-31)' (p. 12).

backwards. The entire comment is highly complex and suggests the intrusion of the extra-diegetic voice. This imbues it with authoritativeness.

The statement, however, is formulated in such a way as to make it ambiguous who exactly these ἀράί are. March (2001) believes that they are ‘the curses invoked on Agamemnon’s murderers at his death’ (p. 223). This reading is supported if we think of Electra’s monody: as we saw, she there appealed to a number of entities in the underworld, among them ‘august Curse’ (πότνι’ Ἀρά, 111). Her cry for help, then, the choral discourse implies, is now being answered.

The actual formulation of the comment, however, raises questions about this interpretation. First, the plurals ‘they are living’ (ζῶσιν, 1418) and ‘those killed’ (τῶν κτανόντων, 1420) suggest that it is not only Agamemnon who is draining the blood of the murderer but other victims of kin-killing in the family, too. This evokes the end of the first *stasimon* where the *choreutai* referred to Myrtilus (509) whose curse, according to the mythological tradition, started the cycle of disasters in Pelops’ family and who, they felt, was responsible for the troubles which have ‘never yet’ (οὐ τί πω, 513) departed from the family. The reference to the curses now, in the lyric exchange, potentially makes this utterance proleptic, too, once more creating the expectation that the chain of doom will not end with the killing of Clytemnestra.

Secondly, the sentence ‘alive are those who lie beneath the ground’ (ζῶσιν οἱ γὰρ ὑπὰὶ κείμενοι, 1419) again recalls Aeschylus’ *Choephoroe*.⁶⁵ there, the servant, who runs from the house to report Aegisthus’ murder to Clytemnestra, tells his mistress that he believes ‘the dead are killing the living’ (τὸν ζῶντα καίνειν τοὺς τεθνηκότας λέγω, 886). In that play, too, the queen appealed for mercy, reminding her son of the special bond that

⁶⁵ Indeed, the whole scene evokes the earlier treatments of the killings in the house of Atreus, not only in Aeschylus but also in Euripides, if his play preceded the Sophoclean version.

exists between a mother and her child (896-8). In Aeschylus, her plea made Orestes hesitate. He only went ahead with the murder after Pylades reminded him of 'Loxias' oracles' (τὰ [...] Λοξίου μαντεύματα, 900). In Sophocles, on the other hand, neither sibling shows any compunction about the matricide. There is a sense, then, that, generation after generation, the curses from the underworld exert their power in an indirect manner: by taking advantage of certain character traits that are common to all family members and that facilitate kin-murders. In my discussion of the third *stasimon* I noted that all parties in the conflict resort to the use of treachery (*dolos*). Now, Electra's and Orestes' refusal to show pity suggests another feature of the family: mercilessness.

Let me now turn to the continuation of the choral comment in the antistrophe. It contains the strongest endorsement of the matricide so far. The *choreutai* state that 'I cannot find fault with it' (οὐδ' ἔχω ψέγειν, 1423). Finglass (2007) argues that 'the chorus's approval for the avengers' action is important for shaping our own' (p. 520). The authoritativeness of the judgement, however, is ambiguous. The stanza begins with the word 'but here they come' (καὶ μὴν πάρεισιν οἶδε, 1422): καὶ μὴν marks the entrance of the two avengers and so signals the return to the action of the play. In the next line, the first person verb ('I cannot find fault', οὐδ' ἔχω ψέγειν, 1423) again shows that the Argive women are performing as a stage figure: their judgement is made on the primary level of communication where the authoritativeness of the discourse is at its lowest. In the end, then, the chorus's positive assessment of the matricide represents just *one* response to the action and it is up to each spectator to come to their own conclusion. The effect of this ambiguity, however, is important: it fosters an analytical approach to the scene, not only to the killing just presented in the strophe, but also to the siblings' dialogue in the next stanza, the antistrophe.

Two details stand out in that dialogue. First, when Electra asks Orestes, whose hands are dripping with Clytemnestra's blood, how things are faring in the house, his reply includes a conditional clause that makes it uncertain what exactly he thinks of his action: 'in the house all is well, *if* Apollo prophesied well' (τὰν δόμοισι μὲν / καλῶς, Ἀπόλλων εἰ καλῶς ἐθέσπισεν, 1424-5). Finglass (2007) argues that 'the statement signals no doubt' (p. 520) and he quotes Fraenkel (1977) who says that εἰ ('if') 'is not hypothetical but simply means "just as"' (p. 26).⁶⁶ The conditional clause, however, can also be interpreted as an expression of doubt, especially since it again evokes Aeschylus' *Choephoroe* where Orestes quickly realises that, by obeying the god's command, he has acquired 'an unenviable pollution' (ἄζηλα [...] μιάσματα, 1017).⁶⁷ Even Bowra (1944), who believes that the vengeance is necessary, acknowledges that there is a momentary doubt in the young man's mind: 'Orestes has discovered that the death of his mother is an appalling thing. It has shaken him far more than he foresaw' (p. 253). The main avenger, then, may no longer be as convinced about his deed as he was when he first reported the Pythian oracle in the prologue (32-7).

The second detail I would like to discuss is Orestes' response when Electra asks him if Clytemnestra is dead. His reply raises questions about the real motive for the killing: 'no longer fear that your mother's arrogance will again dishonour you' (μηκέτ' ἐκφοβοῦ / μητρῶον ὥς σε λῆμ' ἀτιμάσει ποτέ, 1426-7). The matricide no longer seems to be about a son's moral duty towards his murdered father; instead, it has become a personal revenge act of a brother for the treatment of his sister by their mother. Orestes' information about Clytemnestra, however, has been based purely on Electra's report but, as we have repeatedly seen, her portrayal is not

⁶⁶ «Non è ipotetico ed equivale a "proprio come"».

⁶⁷ Similarly Euripides' *Electra*, 1190-3.

entirely trustworthy. This leaves it open if, on these grounds, the matricide is truly justifiable.

The rest of the antistrophe is entirely in the mimetic mode. In addition, the chorus no longer merely observe the action but play an important part in ensnaring Aegisthus: it is they who warn of his approach (1428), they who advise the avengers to go back into the palace (1434-5), and they who tell Electra to lull Aegisthus into a false sense of security 'so that he may rush blindly into the struggle with *justice*' (λαθραῖον ὥς / ὀρούση πρὸς δίκας ἀγῶνα, 1440-1). The Argive women are undoubtedly operating as a stage figure now. It is, therefore, uncertain if we can really trust their claim that the coming struggle between Orestes and the king will represent 'justice' (δίκας, 1441).

Let me summarise what we have found out in the lyric exchange. First, the action is 'shown' throughout. Moreover, all of Electra's utterances are on the primary level of communication. This makes it ambiguous if spectators are meant to approve or disapprove of her comments during the matricide. The chorus's more emotional reaction to the queen's screams, however, draws attention to the victim's mortal terror and provides a striking contrast to the protagonist's pitiless response.

Secondly, the Argive women as a stage figure clearly approve of Clytemnestra's killing. Their two unequivocally positive judgements, however, are made on the lowest level of trustworthiness. Their comment about the curses, on the other hand, sounds authoritative. This, however, is formulated in such a way as to make it ambiguous if the killing of Clytemnestra will really release the siblings from misery or if the curses will continue their work in the next generation. Finally, Orestes' own response to the matricide, his possible self-doubt, and the true motivation for the deed prompts questions about the justice of the revenge act.

8. THE EXODUS (1442-1507) AND THE FINAL CHORAL COMMENT (1508-10)

In the exodus, we finally encounter Aegisthus: he is presented as a thoroughly villainous figure whose utterances demonstrate his personal malice towards Electra (1445-7) and his tyrannical rule over the city (1458-63). This makes his punishment less problematic than Clytemnestra's.⁶⁸ Before he is taken into the palace to be killed, however, his brief dialogue with the siblings raises a number of important questions, not only to do with Orestes' and Electra's action but also with their personalities.

Throughout the entire exodus, the chorus remain silent and so no longer provide any direct comment against which a spectator can compare their own response. The dialogue, however, evokes a number of passages from the earlier *stasima* in which the *choreutai* expressed a positive view of the action. Now, however, the dialogue raises doubts about their confidence. This makes the final scene as ambiguous as the rest of the play. I shall concentrate on three of these echoes: they provide an instance from each of the *stasima* and also evoke some of the main themes of the play: Electra's piety, the justice of the revenge act, and the workings of the *lex talionis*.

As we saw, in the second *stasimon* the *choreutai* praised Electra for planning to kill Aegisthus and commended her for her 'piety towards Zeus' (τᾷ Ζηνὸς εὐσεβείᾳ, 1097). Prior to that, the protagonist herself twice implicitly asserted her piety: in the *parodos* she justified her 'dreadful' (δεδίον', 221) behaviour by saying that, if the murderers of Agamemnon did not pay the penalty for their deed, it would be the end of 'piety' (εὐσεβεία, 250). Later, in her attempt to convince Chrysothemis

⁶⁸ In Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, moreover, Aegisthus states that the murder of Agamemnon is an act 'bringing justice' (δικηφόρον, *Agamemnon*, 1577) to his family: Atreus, Agamemnon's father, and Thyestes, Aegisthus' father, were the sons of Pelops. Atreus expelled Thyestes from his country and, after pretending to be reconciled with his brother, served him a dish containing the flesh of his own children. This element of myth is omitted by Sophocles, giving Aegisthus no reasons, other than personal ones, for killing Agamemnon. This, too, makes him more villainous.

that they should murder Aegisthus together, she stated that both citizens and strangers would 'revere' (σέβειν, 981) them for their action. Now, in the exodus, we are able to evaluate her piety more directly: when Aegisthus realises that he is about to be killed, he asks to be allowed to 'speak a brief word' (σμικρὸν εἰπεῖν, 1482-3). Electra, however, begs her brother to kill their foe immediately and then 'set him out before those *buriers* who should properly perform the task' (πρόθες / ταφεῦσιν, ὧν τόνδ' εἰκός ἐστι τυγχάνειν, 1487-8). As Finglass (2007) says, the language is extremely 'vague' (p. 541), and this makes it ambiguous who the 'buriers' (ταφεῦσιν, 1488) are. Segal (1966) believes that they are human undertakers since the verb προτίθημι ('set out', πρόθες, 1487) 'is the regular expression for the laying out of a corpses' (p. 521). Electra's piety is, then, not in question.

In Homer, however, Nestor talks about Aegisthus being left unburied for the dogs and birds to devour (*Od.* 3.259-61), and the vagueness of the wording in the exodus allows this interpretation, too.⁶⁹ In Euripides' *Electra*, even though Orestes offers this choice of disposal of the hated king's body to his sister (896-8), divine Castor later prevents this act, telling the siblings that the citizens of Argos will entomb Aegisthus (1276-7). There is a sense, then, that even a wicked man deserves a proper burial. As we saw in chapter 3, Antigone makes an even more powerful statement: that the right to burial is enshrined in the 'unwritten and unfailing ordinances of the gods' (ἄγραπτα καὶ σφαλῇ θεῶν / νόμιμα, 454-5). If, in our play, Electra denies Aegisthus this right, it prompts questions about her piety. Ultimately, however, the sentiment is phrased in such a way as to leave the precise interpretation open.

⁶⁹ For ταφεῦσιν ('buriers') as dogs and birds see Jebb, 1894, p. 199; Kitto, 1939, p. 132; Kamerbeek, 1974, p. 191; and Finglass, 2007, p. 541. Contra: Bowra, 1944, p. 255; Friis Johansen, 1959, p. 28, n. 34; Knox, 1968, p. 157; Segal, 1966, pp. 520-21; and MacLeod, 2001, p. 177.

My second example is an evocation of the third *stasimon*. As we saw, the *choreutai* imagined the arrival of Hermes ‘hiding the deceit in darkness’ (δόλον σκότῳ / κρύψας, 1396-7). ‘Darkness’ there has positive connotations: the Argive women are confident that the plot will succeed because Hermes is keeping the villains in ‘darkness’ about the revenge that will soon overtake them. In the exodus, however, ‘darkness’ is used differently. As Orestes tries to drive Aegisthus into the palace to kill him, the king asks: ‘why, if the act is *good*, must it be performed in *darkness*?’ (πῶς, τόδ’ εἰ καλὸν / τοῦργον, σκότου δεῖ; 1493-4). MacLeod (2001) says that this question ‘touches upon the central problem in the play: the tension between τὸ αἰσχρὸν [what is shameful] and τὸ καλόν [what is good]’ (p. 183). Aegisthus’ comment, in effect, questions the very justice of the killing. In the first *stasimon*, in their response to Clytemnestra’s nightmare, the *choreutai* expressed the conviction that ‘Justice [...] shall come, carrying off *just* victory’ (εἴσιν ἅ [...] / Δίκη δίκαια φερομένα [...] κράτη, 475-6). We saw that the extra-diegetic voice problematised this optimistic vision. Now, Aegisthus’ question once more makes it uncertain whether justice is really being performed here.

My final example is an echo with the first *stasimon*. As we have repeatedly seen, the epode with its reference to Pelops, Myrtilus and the troubles that have *never yet* departed from the house, can be read as an indication that Electra’s family may continue to experience calamities in the future. This possibility is raised again in the exodus: when Orestes tells Aegisthus that he must die in the palace because this is where he killed Agamemnon, the king asks if ‘it is needful for this house to witness the present and the *future* evils of the Pelopids’ (ἢ πᾶσ’ ἀνάγκη τήνδε τὴν στέγην ἰδεῖν / τά τ’ ὄντα καὶ μέλλοντα Πελοπιδῶν κακά, 1497-8). The phrase is again formulated in such a way as to leave its precise meaning open. Owen (1927, p. 50) thinks that the ‘future evils’ (τά [...] μέλλοντα [...] κακά, literally ‘the evils destined to happen’, 1498) simply refers to

the king's own death. Jebb (1894), on the other hand, believes that Aegisthus 'speaks of his impending doom as if it were due, not to his own crimes, but to the working of the hereditary ἀρά' (p. 200). As we saw, in the lyric exchange, the chorus expressed the view during the killing of Clytemnestra that 'the curses are at work' (τελοῦσ' ἀραί, 1419). The wording of Aegisthus' utterance and the renewed reference to Pelops again raises the spectre of the arrival of the Erinyes and the continuation of the *lex talionis*.

Famously, however, the Erinyes, does *not* appear at the end of play. Instead, in the choral utterance that concludes the play, the *choreutai* address the 'seed of Atreus' (ὦ σπέρμ' Ἀτρέως, 1508) and state that 'after many sufferings you have at last emerged in freedom, accomplished by this day's enterprise' (πολλὰ παθὼν / δι' ἐλευθερίας μόλις ἐξῆλθες / τῇ νῦν ὁρμῇ τελεωθέν, 1509-10). For March (2001) 'this is an explicit and positive judgement on the whole action: the cessation of misery, the achievement of purpose, the end of all grim striving' (p. 231): the chorus 'sing joyfully of freedom accomplished' (p. 17). Kells (1974), on the other hand, thinks that 'after the brutal realism of the final scene, this taglike ending cannot tell us anything about the play's meaning' (p. 231). Let me analyse the judgement in more detail. I shall start by looking at the markers of authoritativeness.

The comment begins with a vocative: 'o seed of Atreus' (ὦ σπέρμ' Ἀτρέως, 1508). The *choreutai* directly address one, or maybe both of the children of Agamemnon.⁷⁰ The mode is, therefore, mimetic, and the *choreutai* are performing as a stage figure. This makes it ambiguous if their assessment is truly trustworthy.

⁷⁰ Apart from the *Antigone* and the *Ajax* which end with a *gnōmē*, the final choral comment of all of Sophocles' plays are addressed to one or more of the stage figures or, in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, to the wider community, the inhabitants of Thebes. This leaves the authoritativeness of the final comment open in most of the poet's plays.

Secondly, the comment does not actually contain a clear judgement of the action. There is no doubt that we have witnessed much suffering in the course of the play, especially in Electra's grief at her father's murder, at the news of her brother's death, her abuse by the royal couple (no matter whether it is partly self-imposed or not), and her loneliness and isolation within the palace. There is also no doubt that the death of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus will bring this kind of suffering to an end. The problematic elements of the action, however, do not get any mention: the *choreutai* do not sing about the matricide nor do they express any view on the supposed justice of the action. The repeated allusion to the *lex talionis* in the rest of the play, however, raises doubts that the cycle of doom has run its course. As in the *Philoctetes*, questions are left open that point to a possible story beyond the ending of the tragedy.

There are further oddities. First, the chorus call Electra (and/or Orestes) 'seed of Atreus'. Earlier, however, they traced the disasters in the house back to Pelops (502-15), and this ancestor has been the focus throughout the play: both the Paedagogus, when pointing out the landmarks of Mycenae (4-10), and Aegisthus, when asking about the 'present and future woes' (τά τ' ὄντα καὶ μέλλοντα [...] κακά, 1498) referred to the 'Pelopids' (Πελοπιδῶν, 10, 1498). Only Clytemnestra, in her prayer to Apollo, asked the god to let her continue 'to rule the house of the *Atridae* and this kingdom' (δόμους Ἀτρειδῶν σκῆπτρά τ' ἀμφέπειν τάδε, 651). References to Atreus evoke Aeschylus' *Oresteia* where the disasters in the house are traced back to Agamemnon's father, Atreus, the son of Pelops. As we have seen again and again, in the *Oresteia*, Orestes did not escape the matricide without punishment. This reference to the 'seed of Atreus', then, again points beyond the ending of the tragedy.

Secondly, the *choreutai* state that 'freedom' (ἐλευθερία, 1509) has at last emerged. *Eleutheria* featured repeatedly in the course of the play and the word may, initially, evoke the lyric exchange where, as Clytemnestra

was being struck by Orestes, the *choreutai* sang: ‘Oh city, O unhappy race, now the fate that was yours from day to day is waning, waning’ (ὦ πόλις, ὦ γενεὰ τάλαινα, νῦν σοι / μοῖρα καθαμερία φθίνει φθίνει, 1413-14). With the killing of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, the daily hold of the tyrants over the city and the royal household is, indeed, at last at an end.⁷¹ Orestes’ own view of justice (δίκην, 1505), however, which he expresses as he drives Aegisthus into the palace, is ominous: he threatens that ‘anyone who is willing to act outside the law’ (ὅστις πέρα πράσσειν τι τῶν νόμων θέλει, 1506-7) should be punished like Aegisthus: with death (κτείνειν, 1507), and that punishment has to be ‘bitter’ (πικρόν, 1504). This raises serious questions about the future political freedom of the city.

Throughout the play, moreover, freedom has regularly been associated with material wealth: in the prologue, Orestes prayed to Apollo not only to help him become the ‘restorer of the house’ (καταστάτην δόμων, 72) but also the ‘controller of its riches’ (ἀρχέπλουτον, 72); Chrysothemis excused her pragmatism towards the ruler by explaining that it allows her ‘to live in freedom’ (ἐλευθέραν [...] ζῆν, 438-40), and Electra chided her for enjoying such material privilege (δῶρ, ‘gifts’, 360) as good food and clothing and a comfortable life (360-63). Later, the protagonist herself used material wealth as an argument for killing Aegisthus, telling her sister that she would be ‘free’ (ἐλευθέρα, 970) instead of ‘being cheated of the possessions of your father’s wealth’ (πλούτου πατρῶου κτήσιν ἐστερημένη, 960). Clytemnestra’s reasons for holding on to power also partly have to do with material riches: she asks Apollo not to let anyone deprive her of the wealth she enjoys (μή με πλούτου τοῦ παρόντος [...] ἐκβαλεῖν, 648-9). Even the *choreutai* refer to the wealth of the house: in the second *stasimon* they hope that Electra ‘may live as much above your enemies in [...] wealth as now you are below

⁷¹ See *Finglass*, 2005, for the significance of the *polis* in the tragedy.

them' (ζώης μοι καθύπερθεν / [...] πλούτῳ τεῶν ἐχθρῶν ὅσον / νῦν ὑπόχειρ ναίεις, 1090-92); in the third *stasimon*, they imagine Orestes entering the palace 'to the seat of his father with its ancient wealth' (ἀρχαίοπλουτα πατρὸς εἰς ἐδώλια, 1393). As Segal (1966) points out, however, wealth is 'often dangerous in Greek literature' (p. 528). 'Orestes' initial hopes', he continues, 'are for the positive contents of the house: wealth, title, power (ἀρχέπλουτον, 72); but this wealth is old and stained by the past (ἀρχαίοπλουτα, 1393), and Orestes finds in the House not just his father's wealth but, as Aegisthus' words of 1498 ['the present and future woes of the Pelopids'] suggest, also his father's curse' (pp. 528-9).

Finally, the very last word of the play τελεωθέν ('it was accomplished', 1510) is odd. The verb is in the aorist which suggests that Aegisthus' murder has already been performed. The expression, therefore, entails a leap to a time beyond the end of the action of the play. Thinking about this future, however, some spectators may recall the recognition scene: there, the angry Paedagogus, keen to hurry Orestes on to perform the vengeance, evaded the young man's question whether people in the palace were pleased at his death by saying 'I will tell you when the thing is finished; as things are, all is well with them, even what is not well' (τελουμένων εἶποιμι ἄν: ὥς δὲ νῦν ἔχει, / καλῶς τὰ κείνων πάντα, καὶ τὰ μὴ καλῶς, 1344-5). Later the old man also stopped Electra's joyous speech with the words 'I think this is enough; as for the story of the time between, many nights and many days are rolling on that shall reveal this to you' (ἀρκεῖν δοκεῖ μοι: τοὺς γὰρ ἐν μέσῳ λόγους / πολλαὶ κυκλοῦνται νύκτες ἡμέραι τ' ἴσαι, / αἱ ταῦτά σοι δείξουσιν, 1364-6). The proleptic final choral utterance prompts the question what these conversations will bring and whether life will really proceed 'well' (καλῶς, 1345) after the deaths of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. Goldhill (2009) concludes that because of 'the absence of the Furies, the absence of any moral judgment or even discussion of the matricide, the absence of

any indication of what happens after Orestes leads Aegisthus back into the darkened house' (p. 28), 'the ending of the play must at least be seen to provoke a question of judgment from the audience' (p. 29).

9. CONCLUSION

Sophocles' *Electra* has led to diametrically opposed readings. In my view this has to do with the fact that we are never entirely sure if we can truly trust the discourse of the protagonist and the chorus.

Electra initially displays many of the markers of authoritativeness that are usually reserved for the chorus: uniquely, she makes her first appearance before the *choreutai*, her language is highly stylised, and she is more fully aware of the dilemma of her situation and behaviour than other characters in Sophoclean plays. In the first half of the play, this not only creates sympathy for her plight, but also makes her assessment of the goings-on in the palace sound credible.

As the play proceeds, however, this changes. First, the markers in Electra's utterances decrease: although there are passages where her language continues to be highly poetic, for instance, in her urn speech, this is now an indication of her intense emotion, not any sign of special insight. Indeed, the audience know that, after her second quarrel with Chrysothemis, her discourse is no longer trustworthy because she does not recognise the truth of her sister's news that Orestes has finally arrived.

Secondly, it becomes increasingly ambiguous whether Electra paints a true picture of her mother. While the protagonist's life in the palace is undoubtedly miserable, a number of signs suggest that she distorts the facts and attributes motives to Clytemnestra which are based on her intense hatred rather than on reality. In the lyric exchange that accompanies the matricide, therefore, when all the markers of authoritativeness are absent from Electra's utterances and she

dehumanises her mother to an extraordinary extent, it is uncertain whether we are really meant to approve of the matricide.

The authoritativeness of the choral discourse is also ambiguous. As in the *Philoctetes*, the chorus are directly involved in the action. This is reflected in the replacement of several of the traditional choral odes with *amoibaia*. Indeed, even in the *stasima*, they often perform as an intra-diegetic voice. This makes it ambiguous if the Argive women's assessment of the planned murders can be trusted.

Nonetheless, there are instances where the choral discourse takes place on a higher level. Two stanzas stand out because the mode suddenly switches from *mimesis* to *diegesis*. The first occurs in the *parodos* when the *choreutai* describe and assess the murder of Agamemnon: their narrative technique here approximates that of the Homeric storyteller, and the knowledge and understanding they display of the deed and its perpetrators exceeds that of a *dramatis persona*. This indicates the intrusion of the meta-diegetic voice and makes the discourse sound trustworthy. In effect, however, it confirms Electra's evaluation of the crime and so increases the credibility of her discourse rather than that of the Argive women.

The second diegetic stanza is in the epode of the first *stasimon* where the *choreutai* recall Pelops' chariot race and the death of the charioteer Myrtilus. Here, a potentially proleptic utterance suggests that the repeated disasters in the house are due to a curse which has not yet run its course. This contrasts with the optimistic view of the Argive women in the rest of the ode.

The same is true for the subsequent *stasima*. In each, the chorus as an intra-diegetic voice performing in the mimetic mode, approve of the vengeance to be exacted on Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. At the same time, however, vertical dialogic overtones create the expectation that the

lex talionis will continue and that the play will end with Orestes' persecution by the Erinyes.

Horizontal dialogic overtones also make it uncertain whether the chorus's judgements can be read at face value. First, both siblings repeatedly stress their piety. In the prologue, however, Orestes instructs the Paedagogus to use perjury in order to make his report of the chariot accident more believable and, in the exodus, Electra appears to suggest that Aegisthus should not be given proper burial. This prompts questions about the discourse of the *choreutai* who repeatedly assert that the revenge action has the support of the gods.

Secondly, the siblings state that Clytemnestra and Aegisthus are to be killed in requital for the murder of Agamemnon. At the end of the play, however, their action feels more like a personal vendetta against their mother. Moreover, both siblings display a dubious conception of justice: in the exodus Electra denies Aegisthus the right to speak and Orestes states that any transgression against the law should be punished by death. This makes it uncertain if the conviction expressed by the chorus – that justice will be done with the killing of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus – is truly authoritative.

Finally, there are hints that the conduct and personality of the two opposing parties are not that different: both use deceit to achieve their aim; both act mercilessly towards their victims. This again makes it difficult to assess if the chorus's positive evaluation of the killing of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus is reliable.

These ambiguities surrounding the authoritativeness of both the protagonist and the chorus have an effect on the overall interpretation of the play: on the surface, the utterances both of the stage figures and the chorus, suggest that, in certain circumstances, matricide and regicide can be committed without any consequences. Certain devices, however, undermine the authoritativeness of choral utterances, and this allows for

the very opposite interpretation: that the supposedly happy ending of the tragedy is an illusion and that both the Argive women and the stage figures are mistaken in their belief that their suffering has ended.

As the debates among scholars shows, spectators do not generally accept that a discourse can *simultaneously* possess two, diagonally opposed, readings. Instead, they tend to disambiguate:⁷² they *either* trust the primary line of communication and come to an optimistic reading of the play, *or* they perceive that the second line of communication constantly problematises this view and come to a more pessimistic view of the action of the play.

As we saw in chapter 1, the research by Iser (1974) demonstrates how they do this: they try to come to a coherent meaning of what they see and hear by establishing connections between different pieces of information; they then form expectations of how the action might continue and subsequently modify these expectations in view of new information (p. 283). In the case of the *Electra*, once a spectator has decided on a particular reading of the action, depending on their knowledge of the mythological tradition, their familiarity with epic, lyric, and tragic poetry, their theatrical and rhetorical expertise, and their ethical or religious stance, the rest of the play makes sense if they choose to interpret ambiguous utterances in the way that best fits their views. By doing this, however, they fail to appreciate what an extraordinary play the *Electra* is. In my analysis, I have, therefore, tried to show that many utterances seem *deliberately* to be multivalent and that the overall interpretation of the action may well be meant to be ambiguous. This play, then, more than any of the tragedies I have examined in this thesis, reveals how important it is to analyse the mode and level of communication, and the precise context

⁷² See Rabkin, 1977, on the view that readers tend to disambiguate, rather than simultaneously hold two contradictory interpretations, and Budelmann, Maguire and Teasdale, 2016, on the different ways in which spectators disambiguate in the theatre.

of each utterance in order to decide whether a discourse can be taken at face value or if there may be a second line of communication that subtly undermines the surface meaning.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis I have examined how it may be possible to determine where choral comments and judgements in Sophocles' tragedies can be interpreted as *authoritative*, that is, where they can be used as a reliable guide to the interpretation of a particular scene or of the tragedy as a whole. Let me now draw together my findings, illustrating them with examples from the three tragedies I have analysed.

In chapter 1, I proposed a number of markers that suggest where a discourse sounds authoritative. One important aspect was establishing the mode and level of communication of utterances. As we have seen, the most common *mode* in the theatre is *mimesis*: the action there is 'shown' through the dialogue of different stage figures, including the *coryphaeus*. In some odes, or at least in parts of them, the *choreutai* continue to operate in *mimesis*. In others, however, the mode shifts to *diegesis*: the chorus's stage *persona* is effaced and their narration becomes impersonal as they 'tell' us about events. Such moments of *diegesis* occur in the *parodoi* of all the plays I have examined. There are also passages of *diegesis* in some of the other odes, most notably in the *Philoctetes* but also in the *Electra*. The mode influences the authoritativeness of the choral voice because it affects the *level* of communication.

On the highest, or third, level, the 'creative sensibility' behind the play, or what I call the *extra-diegetic* voice, intrudes into the discourse of the *choreutai*. This voice possesses a complete overview of the shape, or *gestalt*, of the action and, through its presence, the knowledge and understanding of the *choreutai* can exceed that of the chorus as a stage figure. The extra-diegetic voice is, then, the ultimate authority of the discourse and it is this voice that, in effect, makes proleptic utterances which prepare for events to come and that employs a self-consciously elevated style to draw attention to motifs and themes in the play. At its

most extreme, it produces complex and puzzling odes like the fourth *stasimon* of the *Antigone* (with its mythical *comparanda* of Danae, Lycurgus, and the sons of Phineus and Cleopatra), or the second *stasimon* of the *Electra* (with its reference to birds, children and parents), or the only *stasimon* of the *Philoctetes* (with its veiled reference to the mythological figure of Ixion). In these songs, the extra-diegetic voice includes cryptic messages that appear to be central to the interpretation of the action. Briefer intrusions also occur in the other odes of all the tragedies I have examined in this thesis, and it is here that the choral discourse sounds most authoritative.

Somewhat below, is the second level of communication: the 'creative sensibility' here reveals itself through the intrusion of the *meta-diegetic* voice. The discourse is in the diegetic mode, and the narrative technique approximates that of the Homeric narrator: the chorus as a storyteller first introduce the scene in bird's eye view, then give increasing detail as they zoom in on the location. Moreover, the *choreutai* now display some of the special abilities of the epic narrator: they possess spatial and temporal freedom, are able to draw together different strands of the action, and give brief glimpses into the minds of the stage figures. In some odes, for instance in the narration of the death of Agamemnon in the *Electra*, the discourse of the meta-diegetic voice is embedded within that of the extra-diegetic voice and helps shift the communication from the second to the third level. At other times, for example in the 'Ode to Man' in the *Antigone*, the meta-diegetic stage is omitted, and the extra-diegetic voice takes over the entire discourse, instantly raising the communication to the third and most authoritative level.

Finally, there is the primary plane: the *choreutai* here simply function as a *dramatis persona*, or what I call the *intra-diegetic* voice. This is signalled by certain linguistic markers, especially first and second person verbs, pronouns and possessive adjectives which show the chorus's direct

involvement in the action. The entire initial stanza of the first *stasimon* of the *Electra*, where the Argive women confirm Electra's interpretation of Clytemnestra's dream, is an extended example. In almost every ode, however, the *choreutai* perform on the primary level at some time.

As an intra-diegetic voice, the epistemological insight of the chorus is limited, the authoritativeness of their comments and judgements uncertain. This is most conspicuous in the so-called *hyporchēmata* where spectators familiar with the poetic or mythical tradition know that the *choreutai* are wrong in their joyous interpretation of the action. In the *Antigone*, for instance, the Elders believe that Creon's decision to reverse his edict will bring salvation to his family and to Thebes; spectators with some experience of Greek tragedy, however, will know that prophecies made by seers always come true and that the king's doom cannot be averted.

In other odes, the epistemological limitation of the intra-diegetic voice becomes clear because the audience have been given information earlier in the play, often in the prologue, to which the chorus have not been party. Again in the *Antigone*, the Elders believe that Polynices has been buried by a male citizen while the audience know that it was his sister who performed the funerary ritual. On the primary level of communication, the authoritativeness of the chorus's utterances is as limited as that of any other stage figure.

Having established these markers of authoritativeness, it soon became clear that there is a tension in the choral voice between utterances that are trustworthy and those that are not. In chapter 1, I gave a broad outline of some of the devices that raise questions about their reliability. Having analysed three tragedies at length, I can now give more detail.

First, the *level* of the chorus's communication can be ambiguous: even where the *persona* of the *choreutai* appears to be effaced and the elevated style suggests that they operate on the second or even the third

level, the precise authoritativeness of their voice may be uncertain because the discourse also contains first or second person markers. In chapter 1, I mentioned the second *stasimon* of the *Antigone*, but the third *stasimon* of the same play supplies another important example: the chorus ascribe the conflict between Haemon and his father to the young man's sexual passion for his bride. The apostrophes to Aphrodite and Eros, however, and the repetition of the second person pronoun 'you' suggest that the *choreutai* are operating as an intra-diegetic voice. The fact that Haemon did not refer to his personal feelings for Antigone but argued in purely political terms, saying that his father's death penalty offended against justice, raises further questions about the Elders' evaluation of the motive behind the quarrel.

The same technique is used in the *Electra* where the *choreutai* repeatedly express confidence in the justice of Orestes' revenge action and the support of the gods while using first and second person markers. This makes the level of communication ambiguous and suggests that the Argive women are operating as an intra-diegetic voice. The authoritativeness of their comments and judgements, then, is uncertain and, because of the cumulative effect of such ambiguities, the interpretation of the entire tragedy is affected.

Secondly, a discourse may be *double-voiced*: the first line of communication suggests one intention, while the second hints at a different, frequently the very opposite, meaning. In its most straightforward form, this occurs at the end of the *Electra*, when Agamemnon's children dupe Aegisthus into believing that Orestes has been killed in a chariot accident: since the king does not realise that he is about to be murdered, he only hears the surface meaning (an invitation to speak to the Phocian stranger and to view the corpse of Agamemnon's son); Electra, the Argive women (and the audience), however, hear the second line of communication because they know about the revenge plot.

The employment of double-voiced discourse is more subtle in the *Philoctetes* because it now also involves the chorus. Neoptolemus and the sailors have agreed that lying is an effective means of tricking the warrior into travelling to Troy: while Philoctetes only perceives the first line of communication, the crew's supposedly sincere expression of pity and piety, Achilles' son (and some spectators) hear the second line which suggests that the chorus are only feigning these sentiments to aid the conspiracy. Interestingly, however, the language is phrased in such a way as to leave it open whether the *choreutai* are telling untruths or not. This makes it ambiguous where precisely their comments and judgements are reliable.

In the *Antigone*, the employment of double-voiced discourse is more complex still because the additional line of communication is between the extra-diegetic voice and the audience in the theatre: intrusions here not only foreshadow the king's downfall; they also suggest that Antigone is partly to blame for the trouble in the royal household and will be punished, too. Not every spectator will notice this, however, but for those who do the choral discourse is imbued with a special authoritativeness.

Thirdly, utterances can, intentionally or inadvertently, create *dialogic overtones*. These may be 'horizontal', that is, they may be generated by echoes from within the play. In the fourth *stasimon* of the *Antigone*, for instance, the chorus's reference to Lycurgus' 'mocking fury' is reminiscent of Creon's angry outbursts throughout the play and of his derisive words to his distraught niece as she was being led to her death. The horizontal dialogic overtones, therefore, encourage spectators to see similarities in the conduct of the two kings, and this leads them to expect that Creon, like Lycurgus, will later be punished. The chorus's discourse in the *stasimon*, therefore, acquires a proleptic quality and suggests the intrusion of the extra-diegetic voice, raising the communication to the highest level.

At other times, however, such horizontal dialogic overtones make the trustworthiness of the choral voice uncertain. In the second *stasimon* of the *Electra*, for instance, the *choreutai* praise the young woman's lamentation for Agamemnon and her plan to kill Aegisthus. At the beginning of the play, however, they criticised her never-ending wailing and, in the scene just prior to the *stasimon*, the *coryphaeus* called for caution when Electra proposed that Chrysothemis and she should murder Aegisthus together. The dialogic overtones here show that there are inconsistencies in the chorus's discourse, making it uncertain which utterances a spectator should privilege.

In the *Antigone* and the *Philoctetes* there are similar irregularities: in the first *kommos* of the *Antigone*, the chorus simultaneously censure and praise the young woman, sometimes even in the same utterance; in the *Philoctetes*, the *choreutai* display pity for the warrior in their odes, yet in the episodes mercilessly use trickery to dupe him. Such horizontal dialogic overtones, which point to inconsistencies in the choral discourse, prompt the question whether the comments and judgements expressed by the *choreutai* can really be used as an authoritative guide to an interpretation of the play.

At other times, the dialogic overtones are 'vertical', evoking, for instance, other versions of the myth on which the action is based. In the *parodos* of the *Antigone*, for example, the choral discourse is reminiscent of Aeschylus' *Septem*. The implied reference to the Argive torchbearer Capaneus, especially the chorus's focus on his boastful arrogance and his eventual punishment by Zeus, gives credence to the Elders' depiction of the gravity of the danger that Polynices and his Argive army posed for Thebes. The vertical dialogic overtones make the choral discourse in the *parodos* sound authoritative.

Other vertical dialogic overtones have the opposite effect: again in Aeschylus' *Septem*, the two sons of Oedipus are mourned equally at the

end of the play. Spectators who also perceive echoes with Euripides' *Phoenissae* and Sophocles' own *Oedipus Coloneus* may, then, wonder whether the Elders' simplistic view of the causes of the civil war in the *Antigone* shows the limitation of their understanding since, in the other tragedies, the motives for Polynices' invasion of Thebes are presented as more complex. This doubt is further supported by linguistic triggers, such as the use of the dual in Greek which emphasises the similarity of the two brothers. In the *Electra*, too, extensive reminders of an earlier intertext, Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, undermine a spectator's confidence in the chorus's conviction that the revenge action will bring the suffering of the family to an end.

Further vertical dialogic overtones may be created with the performance context of a play, for example, the philosophical, political, or cultic background against which the tragedies were put on in fifth-century Athens. In the *Electra*, Orestes' insistence that any transgression against the law should be punished by death must have sounded problematic for many spectators in democratic Athens. When, in the next line, the chorus claim that the murder of the monarchs will finally lead to the freedom of Argos, this assertion may well have sounded dubious.

Other intertexts, based on the view proposed by fifth-century sophists that human development should be viewed in terms of progress rather than decline, may also have created uncertainty: although in these literary and philosophical intertexts Man is at the centre, too, the absence of any reference to the gods in the first *stasimon* of the *Antigone* is striking and prompts the question whether the chorus's discourse can really be read at face value.

In the course of this thesis it emerged that there are a number of other ways in which the authoritativeness of the choral discourse is undermined. First, as we have seen, the line is regularly blurred between the two main functions of the chorus, making it uncertain where they are

operating as an intra-diegetic voice and where *qua* chorus. In addition, at times the discourse of a *stage figure* displays the markers of authoritativeness that are usually associated with the chorus, and he or she provides what sounds like authoritative judgements of the situation. This is the case in the *Philoctetes* with Neoptolemus' six oracular-sounding hexameter lines after the *paeon* to Hypnos and in the entire first half of the *Electra*. In both plays, moreover, the level of communication on which the chorus operate has been made ambiguous: the stage figures, then, seem actually to be appropriating the most trustworthy voice for themselves, making the *locus* of authoritativeness uncertain.

Secondly, a highly elevated style is not always an indicator of the extra-diegetic voice: sometimes it is used simply to heighten the chorus's or a protagonist's emotion. In the *Philoctetes*, for instance, it reflects the sailors' excitement and nervousness at meeting their prey, their impatience with Neoptolemus when he does not steal Philoctetes' bow, and their irritation with the warrior when he continues to refuse to sail to Troy despite facing certain death if he remains on Lemnos. The intensified language of the sailors' comments, then, does not make the discourse reliable: it does not show that a spectator should accept that lying, breaking promises, and stealing is right. The same is true for the *Electra*: the young woman's high style initially signals the trustworthiness of her discourse. By the time of her urn speech, however, it is simply a sign of her utter desolation: it is not intended to convince the audience that Orestes' ashes are really contained in the casket.

Thirdly, the chorus's authoritativeness is undermined when the group's response is not univocal. As we saw, in the *Antigone* there are two different voices that examine the issues of the play from separate angles, Antigone's and Creon's. This makes it difficult to assess which comments can be used reliably to interpret the action. One could argue that the same is also true for the *Electra*, with one voice criticising the protagonist's

conduct, the other agreeing that the only way to show piety and reverence for her father is to lament continuously and plot the murder of her mother and Aegisthus. When the *choreutai* and the *coryphaeus* react differently to Electra's plan to kill the king, therefore, this might not, after all, be a sign of an erratic and untrustworthy chorus, as I suggested above, but an indication that the choral voice is fracturing under stress. In the *Philoctetes*, too, it may be split, with one voice expressing compassion for the warrior, the other treating him simply as a means of accomplishing Odysseus' mission. As in the *Antigone*, a divided choral voice makes it ambiguous which voice's evaluations are to be followed to come to an authoritative interpretation of the action.

Finally, the manipulation of the tragic *form* itself raises questions about the reliability of the choral voice: in Greek tragedy, scenes of spoken dialogue alternate with lyric odes in which the choral group comment on the action in an elevated style. The *Antigone* is a good example of this pattern: five *stasima* punctuate the action, with the *choreutai* singing their response to the events they have witnessed. In addition, there are two perfectly balanced *kommoi*, one at the centre of the play, the other at the end: they mirror each other, the first signalling the destruction of Antigone who, though alive, is being entombed, the second indicating the obliteration of Creon who, although emotionally dead, has to carry on living. This structure, at least initially, raises the expectation that the Elders function *qua* authoritative chorus.

In the *Electra*, this tragic form is disrupted in a number of ways. First, the *parodos* is delayed, and the narrative technique, style, and metre of the protagonist's monody suggest that her response to the killing of her father is authoritative. She appears, then, to displace the choral voice.

Secondly, instead of a lyric ode after each spoken episode, *amoibaia* replace three of the songs. These give equal weight to Electra and the Argive women and, in effect, dislocate the supremacy of the choral voice

as providers of comment on a higher, and hence more authoritative, level of communication.

Thirdly, even the three *stasima* are stylistically much less elevated than those in the *Antigone*, and the authoritativeness of the discourse, too, is made uncertain: although the language of the second *stasimon*, for instance, is elevated and the *choreutai* sing about the duty of birds towards their parents in a style that usually signals the intrusion of the extra-diegetic voice, the level of communication is uncertain because, in most of the ode, they clearly operate as an intra-diegetic voice. In the first and third *stasimon*, too, where the chorus assimilate Electra's view of Clytemnestra's nightmare and express confidence in the divine support of the matricide, the communication mainly takes place on the primary level. Moreover, constant horizontal and vertical dialogic overtones with intertexts that also deal with the disasters in Electra's family undermine the positive view put forward by the Argive women and raise questions about the authoritativeness of their discourse.

Finally, in the lyric exchange and the exodus, the role of the chorus *qua* chorus is reduced to a minimum: Electra takes centre stage, even displacing the traditional, entirely reliable, messenger speech. It is she who provides a running commentary on the matricide, while the choral response is vague and ambiguous. This makes it uncertain how a spectator is meant to respond to Clytemnestra's death. Then, in the exodus, the Argive women fall silent altogether, thus failing to provide any judgement on the killing of Aegisthus. By the end of the play it is uncertain if the chorus have actually retained their traditional function: to help a spectator with the interpretation of the tragedy.

In the *Philoctetes*, the manipulation of the traditional tragic form is taken even further because the sailors play as active a part in the intrigue as Neoptolemus and the choral voice is almost entirely assimilated to that of a stage figure. This has an effect both on the structure of the play and

the credibility of the sailors' discourse. First, the number of formal *stasima* is reduced even further: there is now only one. Even in that ode, however, the level of communication is unclear: after alluding to Ixion, the *choreutai* admit that he is nothing like Philoctetes and that they cannot find an adequate paradigm from myth which might provide an explanation for Philoctetes' suffering. Their insight, then, is limited: they perform as an intra-diegetic voice whose judgements are not authoritative.

All the other odes in the *Philoctetes* have been replaced with *amoibaia*: the *parodos* is a lyric exchange between the chorus and Neoptolemus; what should be the second *stasimon* starts like a conventional ode in the form of a *paeon* but morphs into a dialogue when Neoptolemus utters his hexameter lines in response to the sailors' advice to steal the bow; finally, in place of the third *stasimon*, the *choreutai* perform a *kommos* with Philoctetes. The language employed in these *amoibaia* is less elevated than in either the *Antigone* or the *Electra*. The frequency and intensity of the poetic markers is greatest in the stanzas in which the sailors describe Philoctetes' suffering. The mode there shifts to diegesis, and the discourse takes place on the second level of communication. However, while in the other two plays this technique is often used to mark a transition to the third and most authoritative level, in the *Philoctetes* the chorus usually return to mimesis after the narrative stanza and act as a stage figure again, performing on the lowest level of authoritativeness.

Finally, the choral silence at the end of the *Philoctetes* is even more striking than in the *Electra*: first, it is more extensive, comprising some 250 lines. Secondly, it stands out because the sailors previously played such a prominent role in the action, even trying to pressurise Neoptolemus into proceeding in accordance with the Odyssean plot when he began to show doubts about the intrigue. The group, then, seem entirely to have lost their

ability to function *qua* chorus and to provide authoritative guidance to the interpretation of the play.

What else has this thesis shown? First, we should be cautious when generalising about the Sophoclean chorus. As we have seen, the group are used very differently in the three plays I have examined. Their relationship with the protagonist here plays an important part: in the *Philoctetes*, the sailors remain aligned with Neoptolemus to the end or fall silent when he deviates from the mission; in the *Electra*, the Argive women are the protagonist's friends, but are critical of certain aspects of her conduct; in the *Antigone*, the support of the Elders decreases as Creon's conduct becomes more and more tyrannical. In each play, the choral discourse is composed in such a way as to maximise a particular dramatic or performative effect at a specific time in the action. This should warn us against talking about 'the Sophoclean chorus'.

Secondly, the chorus's discourse should always be analysed in its particular context. As we saw in chapter 1, many critics believe that *gnōmai* must have carried some weight with the original audience because they represent the inherited wisdom of the community. A more complex picture, however, has emerged in the course of this thesis: both the protagonists and the *choreutai* regularly use maxims, but they do so to make themselves *sound* authoritative, often when they actually feel especially vulnerable or insecure. This is particularly evident in the *Antigone* where Creon repeatedly tries to justify his conduct using strings of maxims. The prominence given to Antigone's distress, however, the chorus's ambiguous response, and the democratic performance context make the use of the rhetorical device unconvincing.

The *choreutai*, too, use *gnōmai* in the *Antigone*, especially in the central two *stasima*, in which they sing about *atē* and about the invincibility of Eros. Rather than making the discourse authoritative, however, the maxims are an indication of the Elders' desperate attempt to

find an explanation for the conflicts in the royal household: their reasoning, however, fails to be convincing because of the fracturing of the choral voice or because the precise level of their communication is ambiguous.

In the *Philoctetes*, the authoritativeness of *gnōmai* is more complex. The sailors use them, especially in the *kommos* where, as a stage figure, they attempt to persuade the warrior that they have always acted in friendship towards him and that it is he himself who is responsible for his fate. On the level of the plot, these *gnōmai* do not make the discourse credible because the sailors took such an active part in the deceit of Philoctetes. The issue, however, is complicated by Helenus' prophecy which requires that the warrior eventually go to Troy. This suggests that, on a higher level, the *choreutai* are in fact right because their maxims point to Zeus' plan for the fall of Troy. Gnostic wisdom, *per se*, does not make a discourse authoritative: it always needs to be analysed in its precise context.

The use of mythological *comparanda* also needs to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. In all the plays I have examined, stage figures are compared to characters from myth when they, or the chorus, try to make sense of a distressing situation: in the *Antigone* and the *Electra*, both women liken themselves to Niobe and Procne to justify their extreme behaviour. In the *Philoctetes*, the *choreutai* sing about Ixion, in the *Electra* about Amphiaraus, and in the *Antigone* about Danae, Lycurgus, the sons of Phineus and their mother Cleopatra. In each play, the mythological parallel is meant to explain the protagonist's fate. On the primary level of communication, however, the paradigm is always rejected, either explicitly or implicitly, because it does not provide an adequate elucidation of the stage figure's suffering. Mythological *comparanda* do not necessarily make a discourse trustworthy.

The extra-diegetic voice, however, often subtly intrudes into the discourse to suggest that there are points of contact between the mythological figures and their dramatic counterpoints: Antigone and Electra are similar to Niobe and Procne because they are, at least partly, responsible for their suffering; Danae and Cleopatra are not unlike Antigone, one because she is being imprisoned unjustly, the other because she possesses a somewhat wild character; Lycurgus and Phineus are comparable to Creon, the first for his anger and madness in defying a god, the second for the treatment of his *philoi*. Even Philoctetes could be said to share a characteristic with Ixion: his lack of moderation. The higher level of communication, then, adds a new dimension to the discourse and implicitly helps to guide an interpretation of the action.

The reference to Amphiaraus in the *Electra* is even more complex: for the protagonist, her brother killed in a chariot accident has nothing in common with the son of Amphiaraus who, being alive, was able to avenge his father's death; the audience in the theatre, however, know that Orestes is, in fact, not dead but preparing to murder his mother, just as Alcmaeon killed Eriphyle. For spectators who sense the second line of communication, then, the allusion to Amphiaraus gives the paradigm a proleptic quality and indicates the intrusion of the extra-diegetic voice. At the same time, however, they may now also expect that Orestes, like Alcmaeon, will be hounded by the Erinyes.

Finally, the chorus's appropriation of language from outside the fictive world needs to be analysed within its particular context. In the *Electra*, for instance, the protagonist uses hieratic language at the start and end of her monody. Since, in a non-fictive context, an audience would expect hymns and prayers to be used truthfully, this initially makes her response to Agamemnon's murder sound credible. At the end of the monody, however, she admits her weakness and this makes the level of

her communication uncertain. Cultic language, *per se*, does not guarantee authoritativeness.

In the *Antigone*, too, the *choreutai* use ritual language: in the *parodos*, they sing a *paeon* to celebrate the victory of the Argives, give thanks to the gods, and express the hope that they can now forget the recent war. From the prologue, however, the audience know that Antigone is planning to transgress the new king's edict, and that this is likely to lead to fresh confrontation in the royal household. Later, the Elders' hymn to Dionysus is revealed to be a *hyporchēme*. In both cases, the use of cultic language alone does not tell us that we can trust the discourse. Instead, we need to analyse whether the chorus function as an intra-diegetic voice whose insight is limited or if the meta- or extra-diegetic voice intrude into their discourse making it authoritative.

In the *Philoctetes*, too, the use of hieratic language does not make the choral discourse reliable since the conspiracy against the warrior often makes the chorus's discourse double-voiced. This raises questions about the credibility of the sailors' prayer to Cybele, their apparently pious response to Philoctetes' supplication, and their *paeon* to Hypnos. The chorus as a stage figure use hieratic language, but this does not necessarily help a spectator decide on the interpretation of the tragedy.

Thirdly, choral utterances are regularly formulated in such a way as to make their meaning multivalent. In the first *stasimon* of the *Electra*, for example, when the *choreutai* sing about Myrtilus's death and the never-ending troubles that have engulfed the descendants of Pelops, the phrase 'never yet' may simply refer to the disasters up to the present time. It can, however, also hint at future calamities. Utterances whose precise meaning cannot be decoded with certainty cannot be used as a guide for an interpretation of the action.

In other choral utterances, it is the application that is left open. In the *Antigone*, for example, the mention of 'lack of sense' and 'madness' can

often be understood as a reference to Antigone or to Creon. The switch from one voice to the other, for instance, in the complex and highly oblique second or fourth *stasimon* partly relies on the multivalence of the reference. This, however, makes it difficult to decide exactly how to interpret the choral discourse.

In all the plays I have examined, then, there is a tension in the choral voice between utterances that are authoritative and those that are not. Moreover, as my examples in chapter 1 and a number of the footnotes across this thesis have shown, similar techniques are used in Sophocles' other extant plays, too, in order to increase or raise questions about the trustworthiness of choral comments and evaluation. The next step, then, would be to analyse the poet's other tragedies in the same depth in order to find out precisely how the tension is achieved there and what impact it has on the interpretation of the action.

Let me conclude this thesis by briefly drawing out what effect these ambiguities in the choral voice have on the spectator. First, they encourage an analytical rather than an emotional engagement with the action: as we saw in chapter 1 and at the end of the *Electra* chapter, Iser (1974, p. 283) suggests that spectators try to come to a coherent interpretation of what they see and hear by establishing connections between different pieces of information and forming expectations of how the action might continue. In the course of the play, they keep modifying these expectations in the light of new information. The shifts in the level of communication, the use of double-voiced discourse, the creation of dialogic overtones, and the linguistic ambiguities that characterise the choral discourse in Sophocles oblige spectators constantly to review their first impressions and reassess how they imagine the action to continue. This keeps them alert and fosters debate, often even beyond the conclusion of the action.

Secondly, the tension in the choral voice allows for, even encourages, a wide range of interpretations. To explain this, let me briefly

return to Bakhtin. In chapter 3 of *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1984), the Russian theorist writes the following:

In a monologic artistic world, the idea, once placed in the mouth of a hero who is portrayed as a *fixed* and *finalised* image of reality, inevitably loses its direct power to mean, becoming a mere aspect of reality, one more of reality's *predetermined* features, indistinguishable from any other manifestation of the hero (p. 79). [...] In an environment of philosophical monologism the *genuine interaction of consciousnesses* is impossible, and thus *genuine dialogue* is impossible as well. [...] [Instead,] someone who knows and possesses the *truth* instructs someone who is *ignorant of it and in error* (p. 81). [...] [On the other hand, when an idea] loses its monologic, abstractly theoretical finalised quality, [...] it acquires the contradictory *complexity* and living *multi-faceness* of an idea-force, being born, living and acting in a great *dialogue* of the epoch and *calling back and forth to kindred ideas* of other epochs (p. 89, my italics throughout).

Something like this can be observed in Sophocles' tragedies. While his protagonists are famously obstinate and their personal world view fixed, the 'ideas', that is, the ethical issues that are driving the action, are always presented as 'complex' and 'multi-faced': there is never a sense that there is only one 'truth' and that spectators, 'being ignorant of it or in error', need to be instructed in the correct way of thinking. Instead, there is a 'genuine interaction of different consciousnesses', of different voices. As a result, the conclusion of the conflicts presented in Sophocles' drama is not 'predetermined'.

The way the chorus are employed in Sophocles' tragedies plays an important part in avoiding what Bakhtin calls a 'monologic' presentation: horizontal overtones result in a chorus who is 'in dialogue' with itself; double-voiced discourse encourages a conversation between the extra-diegetic voice and the spectator in the theatre; vertical overtones 'call back

and forth to kindred ideas' in the works of other authors, the tragic conventions of the time, and the political, philosophical, and religious performance context of fifth-century Athens; finally, verbal ambiguity and uncertainties about the authoritativeness of choral utterances results in a discourse whose meaning is not 'fixed'. Ultimately, then, in Sophocles' tragedies, the onus to 'finalise' the play is not on the author but on the spectator.

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